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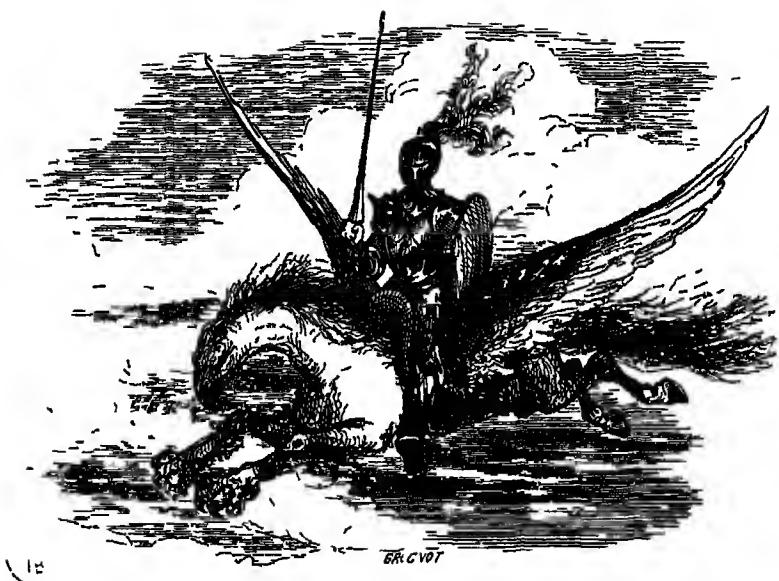
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GEORGE MEREDITH  
AND HIS GERMAN CRITICS



YOUTH CLAIMS HIS HOUR

*(See pages 40, 116 ff.)*

# GEORGE MEREDITH AND HIS GERMAN CRITICS

*by*  
**GUY B. PETTER**

*With Preface by*  
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LONDON  
**H. F. & G. WITHERBY LTD.**  
326 HIGH HOLBORN, W.C.1

*First Published 1939*



*Printed in Great Britain  
for Messrs. H. F. & G. Witherby Ltd.  
at Middle Row Place, London*

And of the fellowship of that great Age  
For whose return our eyes have waited long,  
None left so rich a twofold heritage  
Of high romance and song.

SIR OWEN SEAMAN.



## PREFACE

Here we have an introduction to Meredith, and a key to the vast corpus of critical and expository literature, especially in German, that has come into existence during the last half-century, which can be unreservedly recommended to those whose reading of fiction is a more serious affair than a mode of killing time. This is a book that exceeds its nominal scope; it will help the thoughtful reader to determine Meredith's place in European literature, and not merely in the literature of the last hundred years. For Mr. Petter is a man of wide reading who is not afraid to fetch a comparison, if it fits or throws light on a point, with the Elizabethans or even with the older Classics. Such annotation from far and near is peculiarly necessary in dealing with a genius of Meredith's range, for he was probably the best-read of all English novelists.

Mr. Petter lays proper stress on Meredith's schooldays in Germany, a crucial period that has not hitherto been thoroughly explored by English biographers and critics. It was the time when Germans were imbued with the humanism of Goethe, Schiller and J. P. Richter, from whom Meredith in due course acquired the bases of his social philosophy, on which he was to build higher and wider as his mind matured and other thinkers came within his ken. Not only was the future novelist deeply imbued with German ways of seeing and thinking, with what may be briefly described as German attitudes; not only did he fall in love with towns and countrysides that became later on the scenes of some of his finest novels; he grew so familiar with the works of the best native writers that they often moulded his thought and its expression even when he was quite unconscious of the fact. It is something extremely rare in a foreigner. German critics have recognized it, and have been particularly illuminating on its part in the genesis of what is here rightly described as a new kind of novel. "The poet of evolution" had to devise a new framework and new methods, in order to set forth in a purely artistic form his philosophy of man's life as a process of active development. As is here urged, he was no strict Darwinian, though he did turn down Butler's *Erewhon*, evidently not recognizing that it was a criticism of the doctrine of natural

## PREFACE

selection as the sole agency of growth and variety. *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* and *The Origin of Species* appeared the same year ; but the former, like the novels that followed, was based on less mechanical and more spiritual concepts, in which the views of Carlyle and Spencer were co-ordinated with Darwin's theories. Hence, in correction of René Galland, Mr. Petter observes :

So far from being *de son temps*, Meredith was to an extraordinary degree ahead of it. Instead of making approaches to the spirit of modern science, with its appeal on the one hand to 'facts,' and on the other hand with its soul-destroying influences on life, he showed himself much more closely in union with cosmic powers, which may be recognized though not defined, in the Spirit of Earth, whose loving and reverent disciple he was.

The chapter on "Meredith and Modern Science" is admirable, and indicates the extent to which the description of Meredith as "the poet of evolution" requires some qualification. He was nearer in thought to Butler, although each was repelled by the manner or mannerisms of the other.

It is doubtful whether belief in a crude doctrine of survival of the fittest could possibly have been a basis for the ineradicable optimism which is amply discussed in several chapters of this book. Even the pessimism of *Modern Love* may be put down, surely, to the profound sorrow Meredith felt at the loss of his wife and the general disaster of their union ; though Mr. Petter discerns in these sonnets a "confession of failure," and contrasting them with the optimistic *Roadside Poems* sees "the inspiration of the prophet" crippled by "the weakness of the man." Or perhaps this is a view put forward by Heinz Walz which he would not endorse.

For close particulars of Meredith's kinship to Goethe, not only must the chapter on Maria Krusemeyer's researches be read, but also the commentary that follows ; so, too, with other chapters. The one on Meredith and education is peculiarly interesting, especially with its reasons for his insistence on physical training, in an age when one hour out of the twenty-four was regularly assigned to this, if the weather was fine—and even then it consisted usually of a formal walk "with lesson-books in hand." Such was Victorian education.

Finally, the chapter entitled "Orlando Furioso" must on no account be missed, with the light it sheds on Meredith's loans from Boiardo and Ariosto, debts repaid with interest, or at any rate in modern coinage which will long run current.

ERNEST A. BAKER.

## CONTENTS

	<small>PAGE</small>
PREFACE . . . . .	vii
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	xiii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .	xvi

### PART I

#### CHAPTER

I INTRODUCTORY . . . . .	17
II GEORGE MEREDITH: THREE ESSAYS, by Ernst Dick. . . . .	22
III GEORGE MEREDITH: THE POET OF EVOLUTION, by Bernhard Fehr . . . . .	29
IV TO THE COMIC SPIRIT . . . . .	36
V THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CHARACTERS IN GEORGE MEREDITH'S NOVELS, by Emil Wrage . . . . .	46
VI JEAN PAUL FRIEDRICH RICHTER . . . . .	56
VII THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL ACCORDING TO GEORGE MEREDITH, by Adam Brendel . . . . .	73
VIII THE GREAT SHADDOCK DOGMA . . . . .	78
IX GERMANY AND THE GERMANS IN THE WRITINGS OF GEORGE MEREDITH, by Ernst Dick . . . . .	82
X OPTIMISTS AND PESSIMISTS . . . . .	88
XI GEORGE MEREDITH'S ART IN THE NOVEL, by Philipp Aronstein . . . . .	95
XII ORLANDO FURIOSO . . . . .	101

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIII MEREDITH'S CONCEPTION OF NATURE, by Karl Tesche . . . . .	120
XIV GOETHE'S INFLUENCE ON GEORGE MEREDITH, by Maria Krusemeyer. . . . .	127
XV SOME THOUGHTS SUGGESTED BY KRUSEMEYER'S ESSAY . . . . .	132
XVI GEORGE MEREDITH AND EDUCATION, by Reinhard Becker . . . . .	135
XVII MEREDITH AND MODERN SCIENCE . . . . .	145
XVIII THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEORGE MEREDITH'S ARTISTIC GENIUS AS REVEALED IN HIS NOVELS, by Edgar Mertner . . . . .	152
XIX GEORGE MEREDITH'S EARLY WORKS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR HIS PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, by Heinz Walz . . . . .	155
XX GEORGE MEREDITH AND THE MARRIAGE PROBLEM, by Marie Moll . . . . .	178
XXI GEORGE MEREDITH'S INTERPRETATION OF NATURE IN HIS POEMS, by Waltrud Zeddis . . . . .	182
XXII MEREDITH'S WOMEN CHARACTERS, by Erna Bierig . . . . .	187

## PART II

THE RELATION OF THE SEXES IN THE NOVELS OF GEORGE MEREDITH, by Greta Grimsehl . . . . .	195
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	197
THE MAIN PROBLEM . . . . .	198
(a) <i>The Cause of the Women</i> . . . . .	200
(b) <i>Love and Marriage</i> . . . . .	202
MEREDITH'S INTENTIONS : . . . . .	205
(a) <i>Poet or Reformer?</i> . . . . .	205
(b) <i>Realist or Romanticist?</i> . . . . .	211

## CONTENTS

### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS WITH REGARD TO THE RELATIONS OF THE SEXES—

#### I THE EPOCH OF THE CONVENTIONS:

	PAGE
STARTING-POINT: THE POSITION OF WOMEN . . . . .	214
THE EGOIST :	
(a) <i>The Primitive Egoist</i> . . . . .	217
(b) <i>The Polished Egoist</i> . . . . .	219
THE INFERIORITY OF WOMEN . . . . .	230
THE CONSEQUENCES OF THESE CONDITIONS FOR SOCIETY . . . . .	243
(a) <i>Unhappy Marriages—Marriages of Con-     venience</i> . . . . .	244
(b) <i>One-Sided Morality—Demi-monde</i> . . . . .	246

#### II THE NEW IDEAL:

THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN . . . . .	254
(a) <i>Home and Parents</i> . . . . .	255
(b) <i>Co-Education</i> . . . . .	258
(c) <i>Physical and Intellectual Training are     Complementary</i> . . . . .	259
THE ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE OF WOMEN . . . . .	260
WOMEN AND POLITICS . . . . .	262
LOVE AND MARRIAGE: A NEW CONCEPTION OF MORALITY . . . . .	265
(a) <i>Unity of Body and Soul</i> . . . . .	269
(b) <i>Separation and Divorce</i> . . . . .	270
(c) <i>The Unsanctioned Marriage</i> . . . . .	276
(d) <i>Wild Oats Plea; Eugenics; Children</i> . . . . .	281

## CONTENTS

### MEREDITH AND THE SCIENTIFIC MOVEMENT OF HIS TIME—

	<small>PAGE</small>
INTRODUCTION : MEREDITH A SUPPORTER OF THE THEORIES OF COMTE, SPENCER, MILL AND DARWIN . . . . .	283
SCIENCE AND FAITH, MEREDITH IN COMPARISON WITH TENNYSON, BROWNING AND CARLYLE . . . . .	285
THE INFLUENCE OF EVOLUTIONARY THEORIES ON MEREDITH :	
(a) <i>Meredith's Ethical Intellectualism</i> . . . . .	290
(b) <i>Meredith is not, like Nietzsche, a Supporter of             Darwinism as a Social Science</i> . . . . .	295
(c) <i>Meredith in Contrast to Comte</i> . . . . .	297
(d) <i>Meredith and Contemporary Literature</i> . . . . .	298
(e) <i>Meredith's Agreement with John Stuart Mill</i> . . . . .	302
CONCLUSION . . . . .	307
INDEX . . . . .	311

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SON, 2 vols., London, Constable & Co., 1912.

THE POEMS, edited by G. M. Trevelyan.

### ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT.

THE SHAVINGS OF SHAGPAT :	Shagpat
THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL :	Richard Feverel or O.R.F.
EVAN HARRINGTON :	E.H.
SANDRA BELLONI :	S.B.
RHODA FLEMING :	RH. F.
VITTORIA :	V.
THE ADVENTURES OF HARRY RICHMOND :	H.R.
BEAUCHAMP'S CAREER :	B.C.
THE EGOIST :	E.
DIANA OF THE CROSSWAYS :	Diana or D.C.
ONE OF OUR CONQUERORS :	O.O.C.
LORD ORMONT AND HIS AMINTA :	O.A.
THE AMAZING MARRIAGE :	A.M.
THE TRAGIC COMEDIANS :	T.C.
CELT AND SAXON :	C.S.
ESSAY ON THE IDEA OF COMEDY AND OF THE USES OF THE COMIC SPIRIT :	E. on C.
LETTERS :	L.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to Messrs. Constable & Co. Ltd., London, and Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, for permission to quote from the copyright works of George Meredith.

Wherever possible permission has been asked to quote passages from the books reviewed, and the editor desires to express his thanks for the willing responses which he has received to his requests. Acknowledgments are due to the following authors and publishers:

*Author quoted :*

KRUSEMEYER, MARIA

DICK, the late DR. ERNST

BIERIG, ERNA

FEHR, BERNHARD

ARONSTEIN, PHILIPP

WRAGE, EMIL

FECHTER, PAUL

WALZ, HEINZ

MERTNER, EDGAR

BECKER, REINHARD

GRIMSEHL, GRETA

MOLL, MARIE

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Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, Heidelberg, and the author's family.

The author.

N. G. Elwert'sche Universitäts- und Verlagsbuchhandlung, Marburg, publishers of the magazine *Die Neueren Sprachen*.

Philipp Reclam Jun., Leipzig, Inselstr. 22/24, publishers of the *Deutsche Rundschau*.

The author and C. Trute, Handelsdruckerei Quackenbrück i. Hann.

Eduard Klinz, Buchdruck-Werstätten, Halle (Saale).

The author and G. Kannengiesser Druckerei, Haspe.

The author (now Mrs. Gordon Short).

The author.

G.B.P.

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTORY

ONE may search in vain in the English reviews of Meredith's works for any reference to German opinion, or in his letters for any personal contact with German people; yet the scene of two novels, *Farina* and *The Tragic Comedians*, is laid in Germany, and it is strange that the German market was not tested in the nineteenth century with a novel like *The Adventures of Harry Richmond* with its fairy-like story of love and adventure at the court of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld. If, on and after the publication of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, Meredith's novels had been promptly introduced into Germany, the response would perhaps have reacted favourably upon his reputation in this country. J. A. Hammerton, in his history of Meredithian criticism, wrote:

While in France at least there is a very intelligent appreciation of Meredith's art and philosophy, no such evidence of critical interest has come under my notice from Germany; but I am less familiar with German criticism and may have missed what others are acquainted with.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that, during his lifetime, Meredith was very little known in Germany, although his acquaintance with the country and sympathy with German life and letters are apparent in his writings. Some of the most attractive scenes

<sup>1</sup> George Meredith: *His Life and Art in Anecdote and Criticism*, by J. A. Hammerton, 1911.

GEORGE MEREDITH

in his novels are placed in parts of Germany well known to him, and especially along the Rhine, with which he was familiar ever since his schooldays at Neuwied.

In the year 1899 an essay on George Meredith by Käthe Freiligrath-Kroeker appeared in *Das Literarische Echo*. The author appealed for some recognition in Germany of George Meredith's novels. "So much," she said, "is translated from the English, which is scarcely worth the trouble; why, instead of giving us English novels of adventure and crime, will not someone introduce us to examples from this pure and enlightened source?"

In 1904 *Richard Feverel* appeared in Germany as the first volume of an authorised translation of Meredith's novels, by Julie Sotteck, with an introduction by Fred Sefton Delmer. In the *Deutsche Rundschau*, Vol. CXX, 1904, the book was reviewed by Reinhold Steig, who recalled the fact that, when *Richard Feverel* appeared in England in 1859, there were few critics who recognised the author's purpose to bring back once more reality, passion, and balance to a reading public accustomed to delight in the sentimental extravagances of Lever and Dickens. The article concluded with these remarks:

This attempt to introduce Meredith's novels to the German reading public is worthy of our best encouragement. Julie Sotteck has fulfilled the task of translating an author so difficult as Meredith with devotion and success, while Fred Sefton Delmer, who is an authority on modern English literature, has introduced the work with some apt and useful observations. Whoever has felt the attraction of Meredith will agree with Delmer's final conclusion: "It is right that the influence of a novelist so rich in thought, in humour and imagination, so wonderfully exact and penetrating in his presentation of

#### INTRODUCTORY

human destinies, should be extended beyond the borders of his own country."

Since 1910 an important and original body of criticism has grown up in Germany, dealing sometimes with aspects of Meredith's genius which have not received sufficient recognition from English and French writers, and it may be said that German students have atoned for delay in their appraisement of Meredith's novels by the valuable contributions which they have since made to the general verdict. Nothing more instructive has been written than the essay by Heinz Walz to show how Meredith's spiritual development unfolds itself in his early poems and novels. Becker places in a true perspective Meredith's attitude to modern science and the evolutionary theories of the nineteenth century. Wrage is not alone among German psycho-analysts in his acknowledgment of Meredith, who, he says, probed deeper than his critics into the hidden recesses of the human heart.

Bierig thinks that Meredith's introduction of philosophy and poetic expression into a prose novel, though often criticised in France and England, appeals to German taste. Germans, like French and American critics, are much more unitedly "for" Meredith than his own countrymen. Ernst Dick is the most thorough-going admirer among all the critics, and he has rendered good service as one of the first to commend Meredith to German readers, who naturally find even more difficulty than we ourselves in the first approach to the novels. In not a few cases readers are like Mr. Beaves Urmsing, the hearty Saxon Squire of Hefferstone in *One of Our Conquerors*; they begin by "puffing with wrath at the fellow, but after five minutes (more or less), they must have him at their table and will go anywhere to hear him."

#### GEORGE MEREDITH

Meredith contended against the rearing of women "for the market"; he wished to promote their independence and intellectual development in order that they might be more useful helpers and comrades, as well as better wives and mothers; but, as Moll points out, there is no suggestion of endowing them with masculine qualities, or that the man should surrender his position as the prescriptive leader in society and the family.

Germans are naturally interested in Meredith's many contacts with their country and their literature; the influence of Goethe and J. P. Richter on his art is discussed; his philosophical attitude to life is contrasted with English empiricism, as being something which he owes to his acquaintance with German thought and method; and Mertner emphasises the influence of his education at the Herrnhuter school in Neuwied.

Frederick the Great, under the influence of Voltaire, imposed his royal ban on "the barbarous works of Shakespeare," but the honour since paid by Germans to our greatest poet and dramatist is paralleled in the twentieth century by their tribute to Meredith's genius.

A nearly complete translation is given in Part 2 of Greta Grimsehl's book, published in 1924. Meredith's champion-  
ship of the women's cause has also recently received acknowledgment from an English authoress, Miss Alice Woods,<sup>1</sup> and all who know something of the women's movement in England should be grateful to these two ladies for drawing attention to Meredith's share in the long struggle. People who cannot throw their thoughts back to the middle of the last century may think it laughable to talk about submissive women, helplessly given up, morally and

<sup>1</sup> *George Meredith as Champion of Women and of Progressive Education*, by Alice Woods, Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1937.

#### INTRODUCTORY

economically to the ruthless domination of primitive and predatory men. If so, it is because they do not realise how hard the battle was for women's freedom.

All has now been won for which the movement fought, but we seem to be still a long way from grasping Meredith's philosophy of love and marriage; he did not strive so much for social reform as for a new attitude of mind; for "plain sense on the marriage question." He saw the cause of much unhappiness in marriages hastily undertaken by young people who give no thought to the things necessary for a comradeship which is to endure for life. "What father," he says, "teaches them that a human act once set in motion flows on for ever to the great account?" And again, in a letter to Captain Maxse: "A boy can't, but a man must, reason in these cases. You may know your love from its power of persisting and bearing delay." Meredith's conception of education was not that we should all become learned professors, but that the teaching of experience and close observation of the laws of nature should enable us to make better use of our brains and our common sense.

Dr. Greta Grimsehl is now a British subject, the wife of Mr. Gordon Short, a prominent musician in New Zealand; she herself was as earnest a student of music as of literature.

In the following chapters, those which have the German author's name at the head give a summary (with quotations) of what appear to be the author's most original and useful contributions to Meredithian criticism. In short summaries, unfortunately, adequate justice cannot be done to essays which for the most part run to 100 pages or more. The other chapters are pursuits along side-paths not too remote from the main subject.

## *Chapter II*

### GEORGE MEREDITH: THREE ESSAYS

By DR. ERNST DICK. BERLIN, 1910

DR. DICK, writing in 1910, acknowledges that Germans are far behind the French in their appreciation of Meredith, and he seeks to attract the notice of his fellow-countrymen by giving an account of the author's life, a review of his works and a translation of the *Essay on the Idea of Comedy*. He says:

That we are behind the French is proved by the fact that in the last three or four years quite a number of French magazines have published detailed and important studies of the great Englishman, while neither his eightieth birthday nor his death a year later gave occasion to anything more than a short notice in the principal German reviews.

Dick's admiration for Meredith is expressed in language as unqualified as anything that has come from the pen of reviewers elsewhere.

I have the feeling to-day, he writes, after having for years scarcely thought of any other plans, that I would gladly undertake to devote all my days to him. For he

### THREE ESSAYS

is richer than all others, and of his treasures there is no end.

Elsewhere he writes:

That for which he strove was moral equilibrium, the working together of all the human faculties in a symphony. Over those who would like to disrupt that which we possess; to declare war on the *blood* for the satisfaction of the *mind*; or to build a temple for the *soul*, from which *blood* and *mind* are to be banished; who despise the good things of this world and are untouched at sight of what is wrong, because all their hope is directed to the next world; who dispute about fatalism while remaining obstinately blind to their own failings: over these he casts an oblique glance from his Comic Spirit.

It may be that since Goethe the world has not known such a brilliant and universal intellect as Meredith's; a genius as great in poetry as in prose, in tragedy as in comedy, in lyric as in epic; a thinker in the ranks of the foremost and boldest, but at the same time reverent and reasonable; the best model of a man, both physically and spiritually; in private life a pattern: that is George Meredith! If we wish to be true to our high calling we cannot but admire him, treasure and honour him, as poet, philosopher and citizen; and more than that, we must learn to know his works, if we have as the goal of our desires spiritual strength, moral firmness and a high æsthetic standard. Meredith is one of those rare writers who draw out all the faculties of the reader; one of the few who are able to show us how life can be made to yield substance.

. . . . sweet  
For song our highest heaven to greet.<sup>1</sup>

It is not only in poems like 'The Thrush in February'

<sup>1</sup> *The Lark Ascending.*

#### GEORGE MEREDITH

that the personal note is heard and one gets a self-revelation of the poet. Every verse that he has written, I might almost say, reveals his mind and experience: the personal note is everywhere. Nothing is fabricated, laboured—art for art's sake—with all the wealth of originality there is no trace of pose. Meredith's poetry is the natural outflow from a pure and noble heart, from a mind stirred by deep feeling. It is one great stream, and you will find it everywhere the same, from its sources to the ocean where all streams end: I call it the stream of human love.

Meredith as nature poet is at his best in the *Hymn to Colour* and the *Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn*, about which it will be best to say nothing, because it simply is not possible in a few words to do justice to them.

Of *Rhoda Fleming* Dick says, first quoting Meredith's own introduction:

“ My plain story is of two Kentish damsels, and runs from a home of flowers into regions where flowers are few and sickly, on to where the flowers which breathe sweet breath have been proved in mortal fire: ”

*Rhoda Fleming* is the most passionate of all Meredith's novels. Here there are scenes and characters such as one is only accustomed to find in Shakespeare and some of his contemporaries, in *King Lear* and *Othello*, for example. Scenes which grip the inner being and tear the heart. Balzac is nowhere stronger, or Flaubert more convincing, and the peasants of the story, the maidens, the men, both young and old, are worthy to set beside the very best of Jeremias Gotthelf. *Rhoda Fleming* is a really great work and ought to be reckoned among the most readable of Meredith's novels; especially for the reason that it treats of simpler relationships and the diction is easier than in

### THREE ESSAYS

most of the others. Or is it really too shocking, too true, too deeply moving for the ordinary reader?

Dick, to his credit be it said, is perhaps the only critic who has given serious attention to Meredith's *Ode to the Comic Spirit*. He runs through the whole poem with a commentary or paraphrase, and says:

Even G. M. Trevelyan, with all his skill and insight, does not know what to do with this poem, and puts it aside as not being worth the difficulty of studying, on the ground that it only expresses in an obscure way the same ideas, which the author elsewhere, in the *Essay on the Idea of Comedy*, has developed with all the clearness that could be wished. But Trevelyan is only partly right when he speaks of the similarity of ideas, and he is quite mistaken when he expresses the opinion that the *Ode* without the *Essay* would have been of more worth. Without the *Essay* it would have been worthless, because too vague, too lyrical, too much in the clouds; no one would have understood it. It is only as a companion to the *Essay* that it gets its proper meaning, just as the *Essay* gains importance through the *Ode*. Meredith is not lightly moved, and we may be sure that when he wrote the *Ode* he had a purpose in view, which he had not attained, and in fact could not, in the *Essay*.

This fine poem, if not his last word, is at least his loftiest, most important message on the subject of Comedy. The *Ode* gathers up what by means of examples is set forth in the *Essay* and the novels; it is a fervent expression of Meredith's ideas, throwing a strong light on their ethical side, and it is a passionate lyric, intended not so much to convince as to capture the reader by its charm.

The mission of the Comic Spirit is to purify and

GEORGE MEREDITH

enlighten; he only needs to appear among men in his true form and they will recognise him as a warm, humane, benevolent counsellor. No poisonous satirist—

Speaking the tongue by vipers hissed;<sup>1</sup>  
no cold despiser—  
Of the frosty heights unscaled;  
no empty-minded joker, playing with words—  
Or of the vain who simple speech distort;  
no fatuous humorist, without definite aim or object—  
Or of the vapours pointing on to nought  
Along cold skies.

From the moment when men learn to understand this, they will gladly welcome instead of fearing him. They will acknowledge him as

Captain of our civil Fort,  
and allow themselves to be led by him  
Upon an Earth that cannot stop,  
Where upward is the visible aim.

Here too breaks through again Meredith's gospel of a strong faith in Earth—

Thou wouldst but have us be  
Good sons of mother soil, whereby to grow  
Branching on fairer skies, one stately tree.

<sup>1</sup> This and the following six quotations are from the *Ode to the Comic Spirit*.

### THREE ESSAYS

Dick's object in translating the *Essay on the Idea of Comedy* into German was to draw attention to Meredith, to win for him readers and friends. Those who already know one or two of his works may be led to read them again in the light of this essay, and so understand them better, value them more and then be led to enjoy his other books. But those to whom he is unknown, if they are competent in some small way to appreciate this unpretentious essay, and to unite themselves in thought with the teacher—these will turn to his larger works with all the greater expectation, and with surer steps they will follow even his more difficult and original paths. The essay can be recommended as introduction, and to some extent as guide, to Meredith's works.

But do not let us persuade ourselves that we have no need for this foreign teacher! No, we people of the German language cannot escape the charge that we need very much some instruction in Comedy. Meredith speaks to us just as he does to his own countrymen, earnestly and emphatically—I may almost say with loving concern for us.

'Germans are kings in music, we may say princes in poetry, good speculators in philosophy, and our leaders in scholarship. That so gifted a race, possessed moreover of the stern good sense which collects the waters of laughter to make the wells, should show at a disadvantage, I hold for a proof, instructive to us, that the discipline of the Comic Spirit is needful to their growth. We see what they can reach to in that great figure of modern manhood, Goethe. They are a growing people; they are conversable as well; and when their men, as in France, and at intervals at Berlin tea-tables, consent to talk on equal terms with their women, and to listen to them, their growth will be accelerated and be shapelier.

GEORGE MEREDITH

Comedy, or in any form the Comic spirit, will then come to them to cut some figures out of the block, show them the mirror, enliven and irradiate the social intelligence.<sup>1</sup>

It will not hurt us if we take his criticism to heart. One can make bold to say that since Molière no writer has spoken with greater competence on the subject of Comedy than the author of *The Egoist*. His essay has not the philosophical embrace of the works of some of our writers on æsthetics, but of all that has been written it contains what is most beautiful and true about the nature, the meaning and the uses of the Comic Muse. We Germans do need to grasp what our author means by the idea of Comedy; we do need acquaintance with the Comic Spirit of the prose *Essay* and of the *Ode*.

<sup>1</sup> From the *Essay on the Idea of Comedy*.

*Chapter III*

GEORGE MEREDITH. THE POET OF  
EVOLUTION.

By BERNHARD FEHR

(DIE NEUEREN SPRACHEN. MARBURG, 1910)

MEREDITH's conception of the essence and purpose of the novel was quite new and opposed to the English tradition. Dickens and Thackeray, the greatest novelists of that time, used the novel as a medium for presenting and criticising society. They put upon their stage a group of chosen individuals and after eliminating all unnecessary accessories raised them to types. They understood how to give flesh and blood and expressive colour to these incorporations; how to put a life-like movement into their limbs and muscles, and in their souls a limited range of those feelings and motives which every reader has already experienced in himself. And then they gave to the powers embodied in these types their relevant activity in space and time: they created, in fact, a story, now lively, now stirring, rousing the sensations of the reader, even stunning him, but never wearying his understanding by making it difficult for him to follow the play of forces.

Meredith understood his vocation quite otherwise, and

GEORGE MEREDITH

he has explained his theory of the novel in *Diana of the Crossways*. In Diana's description of the aristocratic Dacier he gives expression to both methods.

*Old method:*

His eyes are pale blue, his features regular, his hair silky, brownish, his legs long, his head rather stooping (only the head), his mouth commonly closed; these are the facts, and you have seen much the same in a nursery doll. Such literary craft is of the nursery.

*New method:*

He lends an attentive ear when I speak, agrees or has a quaint pucker of the eyebrows dissenting inwardly. He lacks mental liveliness—cheerfulness, I should say, and is thankful to have it imparted. One suspects he would be a dull domestic companion. He has a veritable thirst for hopeful views of the world, and no spiritual distillery of his own. He leans to depression. Why! The broken reed you call your Tony carries a cargo, all of her manufacture—she reeks of secret stills; and here is a young man—a sapling oak—inclined to droop.

As the second description shows, Meredith is concerned, not to put in the forefront the purely external features which strike the senses, but the things which interest our understanding, the inner condition, the state of mind. An outer feature, such, for example, as the above-mentioned pucker of the eyebrows, is only of interest in so far as it is a visible sign of something happening in the brain. Many of his pictures simply refuse to delight in the outward beauty of the eye; it is only the inward beauty of the mind's eye that we are to recognise. Until now the popular novels

## THE POET OF EVOLUTION

had collected the merest fragments of the truth, the outward being and doing, and made a purposeless heap of them. But a representation of modern human life must occupy itself with the whole truth, outer and inner, and in order to attain to this, *Philosophy* must make its entry into novels. To expect from us the truth, and at the same time shut out philosophy, is like asking a pumpkin to dance. Just as much as legs are necessary for dancing so do we need philosophy in order to make human nature acceptable and credible. History without philosophy is only the skeleton of events. Novel writing without philosophy is a presentation of figures which a man draws who knows nothing of anatomy. The narrative is nothing; it is only the vehicle of the philosophy. The interest lies in the thought which the action illuminates, and true literature, whether poetry or prose, must be the chosen handmaid of philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Meredith's intellectual development belongs to a time of great discoveries and revolutions in the field of science. Impressed with the evidence of progress men thought themselves already near the goal of a clear insight into the deepest secrets of life, when the most complicated problems would at last be resolved. It was the great era of hope and promise. The common object to which all research was devoted, was the discovery of *the unity in diversity*, either through recognition of laws of nature on which the most diverse phenomena were clearly dependent; or through the conception of nature as a great organism which has not originated by an act of creation, but by evolution; or, thirdly, by attributing to nature an individuality and a soul. Great and various were the publications in those days in the field of science; it is only possible here to mention the most

<sup>1</sup> Compare the first chapter of *Diana of the Crossways*.

### GEORGE MEREDITH

important. Mill's *Logic* appeared in 1843, just at the right moment to help the search for universal law. In 1844 Robert Chambers's book, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, made a great stir; in this book the idea of Darwinian evolution was put forward simply on the speculative side, without any foundation of experiment. In 1847 Helmholtz read his famous paper on the *Conservation of Force*, and in 1851 Fechner developed in his *Zendavesta* his animistic world-conception. The year 1855 saw the publication of two important works, Spencer's *Principles of Psychology* and Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff*. From 1855 to 1860 Humboldt was working at his *Cosmos*, and in 1859, the year when Meredith published *Richard Feverel*, Darwin took the world by storm with his *Origin of Species*.

From these centres of illumination rays of light emerged, which directly or indirectly came to a focus in Meredith. To endow nature with a soul was nothing new in the poet's world of thought, but when Meredith raised evolution to be the theme of his poetry and treated it as the foundation for a study of human character, it was a bold stroke entirely new in the history of English literature.

Man is the result of a long process of evolution; he has come out of the earth through an infinite number of intermediate stages; steps which even now we may recognise in the animals. He has never forgotten this relation, because only too often ancestral influences recur to remind him. But the fact of evolution has an ethical importance for mankind. We know that it must go further; that it is our lot to advance to still higher and nobler beings. In the individual there has developed a sense of duty, a feeling that he can never stay still or speak as if he has reached a final goal; he must ever fight on to further heights along the path of progress. God is with him only while he fights.

#### THE POET OF EVOLUTION

No prayer, save for strength to keep his ground,  
Heard of the Highest; never battle's close,  
The victory complete and victor crowned:  
Nor solace in defeat, save from that sense  
Of strength well spent, which is the strength renewed.

        .        .        .        .        .

God being there while he his fight maintains.

#### *The Test of Manhood.*

Eternal striving is the password for effectual life. Evolution has no end; a kingdom of perfection at a later time, on earth or in the clouds, as a consummation of the evolutionary process, does not exist. That would be the end of all life; everlasting rest, everlasting death.

But the theory of evolution is not enough for Meredith to explain the real nature of life. Unity in diversity reveals to him, the poet, as it did to Fechner, the physicist, the soul which penetrates the universe. Meredith was not only a pupil of Darwin and Spencer; he came under the influence of the Scottish prophet Carlyle. Like Carlyle, he saw in the outward phenomenon, which we call the world, only the garment of real existence, but a garment, which in contrast to Carlyle's conception of it, had life and was ever renewing itself according to the laws of evolution. The innumerable modifications, which we comprehend in the words man and nature, are only the incorporations of a spiritual unity. Man is the latest phenomenon of nature; his elder brothers are the animals, clouds, woods, rivers, mountains, seas; they are the earlier, more primitive manifestations of the soul pervading all; and *in the machine*,<sup>1</sup> not by the side of it, exists the God of this world. But Meredith does not

<sup>1</sup> *Richard Feverel*, Chap. xxxiii

GEORGE MEREDITH

usually speak of God when he thinks of the spirit dwelling in the outward forms; nor does he call him the world spirit, but just Earth. Not that Earth represents for him the Universe or the soul of it. The Earth is only a part of it, but it is that part which we observe and of which we share the life, because we belong to it. There may be other worlds in the Universe, and when Meredith looks up at the stars, they are not for him mere frosty lamps illumining dead space, distant aliens or senseless powers, but flames of the same fire that burns in us. But their life and evolution extend beyond the reach of our observation; we can only draw analogies. Our *visible friend* is Mother Earth; she is the soul and the material, the flame and the wood.

The highest duty of man, as the intellectual product of earth, is to recognise his place in creation, and not to regard himself as a solitary being, but to be ever more conscious of his relation to the whole.

The highest purpose of the mind and its delight is to read the meaning of earth through the million letters and symbols which her open book presents to our eyes.

The test of manhood is the man's ability to bring heart and feeling under the control of intellect.

Dares he behold the thing he is, what thing  
He would become is in his mind its child;  
Astir, demanding birth to light and wing;  
For battle prompt, by pleasure unbeguiled.  
So moves he forth in faith, if he has made  
His mind God's temple, dedicate to truth.  
Earth's nourishing delights, no more gainsaid,  
He tastes, as doth the bridegroom rich in youth.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Test of Manhood.*

THE POET OF EVOLUTION

At times he may relapse, but

'Tis that in each recovery he preserves,  
Between his upper and his nether wit,  
Sense of his march ahead, more brightly lit;  
He less the shaken thing of lusts and nerves;  
With such a grasp upon his brute as tells  
Of wisdom from that vile relapsing spun.  
A Sun goes down in wasted fire, a Sun  
Resplendent springs, to faith refreshed compels.<sup>1</sup>

Let him step through the world on the path of progress,  
tasting the fruits and pleasures which earth offers him on  
every hand—but never standing still. Let him lift  
high the shining sword of common sense, and when  
his arm drops, hand it on joyfully to his successor,  
thankful to have played his part in “this world of  
minds communicative.”

<sup>1</sup> *The Test of Manhood*

## *Chapter IV*

### TO THE COMIC SPIRIT

“ZUR VERACHTUNG zu unwichtig und zum Hasse zu gut . . . ein dermassen freigelassenes Spiel, dass er's an geliebten und geachteten Personen treiben kann, ohne sie zu versehren.”

Jean Paul Richter.

“This ode,” says Eugen Frey, “is for the most part unintelligible. Fortunately Meredith has in the *Essay on Comedy* more plainly said what he means by the Comic Spirit, and in the novels he shows us how he handles the weapons of this Imp. Those who read the novels would do well to make themselves acquainted with the *Essay on Comedy*.”

Most of the critics agree with Eugen Frey in their disrespectful avoidance of the Ode. Trevelyan passes it by with the remark that the ideas have been better expressed in the prose *Essay on Comedy*.

But the Ode is not to be so lightly dismissed. However well he may have expressed his thoughts in prose, Meredith's honour was engaged to test their acceptance of song,<sup>1</sup> and in this poem there are some really fine passages in which the poet's message is unfolded on his favourite themes; youth, laughter, women, egoism, and he dares to

. . . probe  
Old institutions and establishments,  
Once fortresses against the floods of sin,

<sup>1</sup> See page 63.

TO THE COMIC SPIRIT

For what their worth; and questioningly prod  
For why they stand upon a racing globe,  
Impeding blocks, less useful than the clod;  
Their angel out of them, a demon in.<sup>1</sup>

Menander is, for Meredith, the pillar of the comic art, and in this connection Bierig (whose book is reviewed in chapter xxii), quotes a passage from Benedetto Croce's *Poetry and Non-poetry*:

When in Greece the religious, mystic and poetic impulse was exhausted and gave place to enquiry and criticism, Comedy changed from the fantastic, clever and laughable type of Aristophanes to that of Menander, in which (as was perhaps first brought to light by Vico, and more generally made known by Nietzsche), there breathes the spirit of Socratic enquiry. From that time moralists and writers of Comedy sealed a bond of fellowship.

Meredith calls Comedy the "governing spirit," taking rank above the more primitive genius of satire, irony or humour. Here, says Bierig, he is in full agreement with Aristotle's *Poetics* as to the true nature of Comedy, which, said the great Greek scholar

is superior to "invective." The latter criticises the evil in a person or thing without disguise, while Comedy clothes it in artistic form. When we smile at faults and unworthiness, the effect is not painful or injurious, just as the comic mask has a vulgar and distorted, but not a painful expression.

This obvious relationship, continues Bierig, of Meredith's

<sup>1</sup> *To the Comic Spirit.*

GEORGE MEREDITH

Comic Spirit with the ideas of the great classical philosopher is another proof that Meredith conceives the ideal modern comedy—even in prose form—as necessarily bound up with the eternal laws of antique comedy. How carefully he constructed *The Egoist* in conformity with the precepts of the *Essay on Comedy* we may know from his own words. “*The Egoist*,” he writes in a letter of 1906, “comes nearer than the other books to the proper degree of roundness and finish.”

For Meredith the classic stage comedy of Menander and Molière finds a new and acceptable medium in prose romances of social life and manners, and it is in this sense that he calls *The Egoist* a comedy in narrative.

Molière, says Meredith, is the comic poet without a fellow. It is not only community of thought which links the *Ode to the Comic Spirit* with Cléante’s tirade in *Le Tartuffe*: they are alike in the pains which have been taken to enrich the expression.

“I have tried,” said Molière, “with all the art and all the care of which I am capable, to distinguish the hypocrite from the truly devout.”

And Voltaire declares:

“I make bold to say that Cléante’s discourse, in which true and enlightened virtue is contrasted with the idiotic sanctimoniousness of Orgon, is in some of its passages the strongest and most eloquent sermon that we have in our language.”

Hé quoi? vous ne ferez nulle distinction  
Entre l’hypocrisie et la dévotion?  
Vous les voulez traiter de semblable langage,  
Et rendre même honneur au masque qu’au visage;

TO THE COMIC SPIRIT

Egaler l'artifice à la sincérité,  
Confondre l'apparence avec la vérité,  
Estimer le fantôme autant que la personne,  
Et la fausse monnaie à l'égal de la bonne ?  
Les hommes la plupart sont étrangement faits !  
Dans la juste nature on ne les voit jamais ;  
La raison a pour eux des bornes trop petites ;  
En chaque caractère ils passent ses limites ;  
Et la plus noble chose, ils la gâtent souvent  
Pour la vouloir outrer et pousser trop avant.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. J. H. E. Crees says that the Ode is frigid. It certainly has not the warmth of a chimney corner, where the light reader may lounge with his feet upon the mantelpiece and steep his senses in forgetfulness. It is cool and refreshing, like a Pierian Spring into which the bather must plunge head first. If you cannot think and concentrate; if you read only for amusement, the Ode is not for you. It is allegorical, and as James McKechnie says:

To read allegory is to read oneself. It is a magnet to draw out and a mirror to reflect a man to himself, so bringing him into possession of the hidden resources of his own thought. For this reason—provided always that the truth concealed be, on its own merits, worth finding—must not that game of hide-and-seek with it, which allegory essentially is, be declared of all intellectual games the one whose rewards are noblest.<sup>2</sup>

Through the Ode we first realise how Meredith's theory of Comedy is the foundation of his philosophy and the essence of his belief in the growth of Nature's children.

<sup>1</sup> *Le Tartuffe*.

<sup>2</sup> Meredith's Allegory, *The Shaving of Shagpat*, by James McKechnie, London, 1910.

GEORGE MEREDITH

When he speaks of Thalia we feel that he is drawing from the deepest springs of his affections. With persevering study of this Ode the obscurities vanish, and no other poem that Meredith has written gleams more brightly with his enthusiastic faith in the guiding star of human destiny.

The Comic Spirit is a weapon; it is the Sword of Common Sense, with which the vigilant understanding protects itself from surprise attacks of the uncorrected heart. This priceless weapon has been won in the long struggle of humanity; it is the fruit and symbol of true culture. The mission of the Comic Spirit is to keep watch upon the shifty heart of man; to uncover the hiding places, where lurks the fox or snake, or where the primitive brute in us still survives, ever ready to lift a paw, naming his appetites his needs. In mankind the prime motive still bares a savage tooth, and would drag us back to the caves from which we have emerged with so much sweat of blood. The Comic Spirit sees through the tricks and practices of rebellious hearts, and merrily goes the chase when he detects selfish or brutal egoism advancing, often with wary step or fluting voice or visage of the lily flower.

But youth claims his hour. When the cock crows in the ruddy morning of our days, it is the licensed season for his ludicrous exuberance. Let him but have a mind to take and keep an impression, lest he grow as the stunted children of the heart untamed to tone its passions under thought: aged ones demanding reverence; kings and venerable sages, who claim lordship and leadership, while imposing outworn charters upon live conditions; usurpers, majestic in a borrowed shape—these stir the Comic Spirit to let loose his hounds of laughter. They are a danger to humanity; a hindrance to all real progress.

Then follows the melancholy story of the fallen gods:

TO THE COMIC SPIRIT

it is a parable worthy of the Muse. It preaches to the eminently placed: those who aspire to live on heights must learn to live with Momus, the Sage of Mirth, whose sweet singing keynote of the wise is laughter.

Here, as in *Shagpat* and *Richard Feverel*, laughter is the key which will unlock the doors of sentimental prisons. But Zeus was an usurper and laughter made him nervous; so he gave that fatal kick to Momus. And those Gods of deathless mould are now a band which a gay cripple (Momus) leads for the amusement of the crowd on Bank holidays. The scene becomes all the more degrading when both gods and people pay their devotions to Bacchus, or beer. Zeus is the trombone in the band, whose blasts are a poor substitute for his ancient thunder. The fallen lot of Herakles and Ares is worse than death; they have become pathetic objects of ridicule, and Ares has had the worst of an encounter with the police. Apollo and Artemis, twin divinities of the Sun and Moon, are in the band as Harp and Triangle, with much loss of ancient splendour; we have exchanged the sunshine for night life and a "hang-over." Artemis, the huntress, the chaste goddess of physical fitness, is the gibbous prude, that is, she is out of fashion with the holiday crowd, her moon is waning, and she who was "sweet beyond the thrill of sex" can make no appeal to a mob which mistakes purity for prudery.

Athena is there, the Goddess of wisdom and the arts, Queen of the State; but the civilised world is no longer one state, the globe is now a bunch of cupolas, and she,

*the blowziest Queen  
Of overflowing dome on dome,*

that is, of competing nations;

GEORGE MEREDITH

*Redundancy contending with the tight;*  
the "Haves" contending with the "Have-nots," and these  
*Leaping the dam;*  
breaking out in revolution, or violating international  
boundaries and obligations.

He fondly calls, his girl,  
The buxom tripper with the goblet-smile,  
Refreshful.

Momus is now panting with exhaustion and at each comma  
pauses to recover breath. Here you will recognise Hebe,  
or perhaps Thalia, or any other goddess that you may  
prefer; it really does not matter.

But Aphrodite, Heaven's brightest star, Queen of Love  
and Beauty, can it be that she has left her temples to touch  
the lowest here? Enough that the black story can be told.  
The poet's eye glances from Heaven to Earth, as he reaches  
here the theme which lies closest to his heart. The peerless  
Dame of dames: she too

For that she could not, save in fury, hear  
A sharp corrective utterance flick  
Her idle manners, . . .  
    . . . sinks, all brine  
To thoughts of taste; is't love?—bark, dog! hoot, owl!

The beasts and birds cry shame upon the human family,  
which has bartered the priceless gift of Love for Astarte  
rites malign with all their trail of suffering and disease.  
*The curtain cried for magnifies to see!* We only increase  
the social evil by trying to cover it up.

TO THE COMIC SPIRIT

We cannot quench our one corrupting glance:  
The vision of the rumour will not flee.

When Olympus crumbled with all its paraphernalia of thunderbolts, of fire and tempest to smite evildoers, we set up magistrates to punish vice and crime, to humble the pride of the motorist or check the vagaries of the Bacchanalian. But that is not enough; to correct our more subtle follies and foibles, which may be no less serious in their consequences, we need the Comic Spirit.

The cunning ones, who cover their untruthfulness with a mask of honesty and strike the chords of sentiment to deaden the sound of their footsteps, are the beasts and birds of prey, scattering the land with the bones of their victims. In finance, in trade, in religion, in international relations (the field least governed by settled laws), we are still subjects of the uncorrected heart, or at the mercy of

These, that would have men still of men be foes,  
Eternal fox to prowl and pike to feed;  
Would keep our life the whirly pool  
Of turbid stuff dishonouring History;  
The herd the drover's herd, the fool the fool,  
Ourself our slavish self's infernal sun.

The remainder of the poem is so clear and beautifully expressed that no elucidation is needed. Our heart and passions, though at times inspired with lofty aspirations, are too apt to follow this or that delusive spark, instead of being guided by the Comic Spirit, which is the light of the mind. He only needs to appear among us and we shall recognise him as a humane and purifying influence. Even now a small group of men and women has learnt that we fight

GEORGE MEREDITH

against ourselves when we decline his leadership. Already we hate him less; indeed begin to understand him a little, and are not outrageously provoked when he puts our failings to the test of his keen perception. The human heart, though still restless and stubborn, is destined to grope its way at length out of the primeval forests in which it has too long been held a captive. Our discords will cease when reason is our teacher

Upon an Earth that cannot stop,  
Where upward is the visible aim.

A straggling Nature classed in school, and scored  
With stripes admonishing, may yield to plough  
Fruitfullest furrows, nor for waxing tame  
Be feeble on an Earth whose gentler crop  
Is its most living, in the mind that steers,  
By Reason led.

Nor for waxing tame be feeble! We cling to this faith to-day, though sorely tried. Meredith, with all his devotion to the cause of peace, was a patriot who believed that England would have to adopt conscription. In 'The Call' he hinted at the danger already threatening from Germany, and at how it should be met:

Has ever weakness won esteem?  
Or counts it as a prized ally?  
They who have read in History deem  
It ranks among the slavish fry,  
Whose claim to live justiciary Fates deny.  
It can not be declared we are  
A nation till from end to end  
The land can show such front to war  
As bids a crouching foe expend  
His ire in air, and preferably be friend.

TO THE COMIC SPIRIT

The grandeur of her deeds recall;  
Look on her face so kindly fair:  
This Britain! and were she to fall,  
Mankind would breathe a harsher air,  
The nations miss a light of leading rare.

## *Chapter V*

### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CHARACTERS IN GEORGE MEREDITH'S NOVELS.

By EMIL WRAGE. MARBURG, 1911

PSYCHOLOGY, says C. K. Ogden, is the youngest of the sciences and the most attractive:

O latest born and loveliest vision far  
Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy,

wrote Keats in his *Ode to Psyche*.<sup>1</sup>

Emil Wrage is a psychologist who submits Meredith's novels to a thoroughly scientific examination, not upon their literary merits, but, in a way analogous to that of a medical student in the research laboratory, he uses the implements and methods of a new technique to test our great psychological novelist by standards which were not invented when he wrote.

"George Meredith," he says,

has long been the acknowledged master of the psychological novel in modern English literature. All his critics, whatever else they have to say, agree in one thing, that in the art of presenting moods and workings of the spiritual faculties Meredith bears the palm among the

<sup>1</sup> From *The ABC of Psychology*, by C. K. Ogden, London, 1930

## PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CHARACTERS

story tellers, not only of England, but of all countries. For this reason I was tempted to examine his novels using the methods of modern psychology, because, although his critics acknowledge his powers of psychological analysis, they have hardly made them a subject of systematic study.

Max Meyerfeld, in *Das literarische Echo*,<sup>1</sup> writes:

Long before the complicated science of psychology, the anatomy of the soul, began to wave its banner in the breeze, George Meredith had so richly explored the labyrinths of the human breast, and with such deep sympathy picked his way along the tortuous by-paths of human nature, that other writers coming after him find, as it were, a broad highway made ready for them.

Wrage, following the researches of Wilhelm Wundt, finds complete confirmation for this dictum. Meredith is a realist in the best sense of the word, namely a realist in psychological things. Moreover, an examination of his style from this standpoint leads to the same conclusion, confirming the fact, among other things, that Meredith's figurative, metaphorical language is the vehicle best adapted to psychological analysis, that his rich similes and comparisons serve to perfection the purpose of illuminating the secret processes of the heart, making them clear to the reader by means of swift glances from the psychical to the physical.

Wrage takes the principal characters of Meredith's novels into his dissecting room and applies to them the new reagents with results which he finds completely satisfactory. The case of Diana Warwick,<sup>2</sup> who sold a state secret to Mr. Tonans, is particularly worth quoting, as it

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VII, p. 471.

<sup>2</sup> *Diana of the Crossways*.

GEORGE MEREDITH

has so often been the subject of criticism. Curle and Henderson, who in other respects have perhaps understood Meredith best, are agreed in their judgment of this incident as a psychological impossibility. They are, however, both mistaken. Henderson's objection is grounded on Diana's brilliant intellectual gifts:

It has been Meredith's contention throughout that Diana's powers and intellect are exceptional. Does he really intend us to think that a woman of Diana's intellect could have placed the friend, in whose interests she was entertaining, in such a position? Here we touch the central falsity of the tale. . . . The discrepancies between Diana's statements, made but twenty-four hours apart, are too much of a strain on the reader. In the first scene she exclaims: "And you were charged with the secret all the evening and betrayed not a sign! . . . The proposal is? No more compromises? Total?" Diana clapped hands; and her aspect of enthusiasm was intoxicating. . . . "We two are a month in advance of all England." In the second she pleads: "You did not name it as a secret. I did not imagine it to be a secret of immense, immediate importance." And in reply to his amazed shout of "What?" goes on to say: "I had not a suspicion of mischief. . . . I thought it was a secret of a day. I don't think you—no, you did not tell me to keep it secret. A word from you would have been enough. I was in extremity!"

Henderson comes finally to this conclusion:

Either Diana is a fool, passing even the 'ordinary Woman' in her folly (she can entertain the idea of being paid thousands of pounds for information of negligible importance), or she is proving beyond all refutation that the political basis of her intercourse with Dacier is a sham.

That seems at first sight to be a commonsense view, but is exactly for that reason superficial and unpsychological. Curle, whose verdict is similar, says: "And here is the one incident of her life that does seem to be impossible of rational explanation." Here exactly lies the fallacy: the critics are too rational, we might almost say too logical; the deed does not correspond with Diana's intellectual gifts; but her action has a psychological stimulus and this is sufficiently indicated by Meredith. To understand her action we must see that it was the result of emotion, and one has only to refer to the writings of scientific psychologists in order to study the nature of emotion. Thus Nahlowsky says: "It is in the same way easy to see how emotion always weakens and endangers the powers of reflection and with that also the will power." Here lies the clue to the problem.

Diana Merion was famous for her beauty and her wit. "She is a splendid brune," writes a diarist, "and what is more, the beautiful creature can talk." She was scarcely twenty when she came from Ireland to make a round of visits at English country houses, where she seems to have had a bad experience among fellow guests.

The famous ancestral plea of the 'passion for his charmer' had not been altogether socially quashed down among the provinces, where the bottle maintained a sort of sway, and the beauty which inflamed the sons of men was held to be in coy expectation of violent effects upon their boiling blood.

Her experience had wakened a sexual aversion, of some slight kind, enough to make her feminine pride stipulate for perfect independence, that she might have the calm out of which imagination spreads wing.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Diana of the Crossways*, Chap. iv.

GEORGE MEREDITH

We read that the idea of a convent was more welcome to her than the most splendid marriage. But she is doomed to suffer further persecution. On a stroll through the woods with Sir Lukin Dunstane, the husband of her friend Emma, that "amorously adventurous cavalier" is so carried away by her beauty that he tries to steal a kiss. Her womanly pride is deeply wounded: ". . . she was profoundly humiliated, shamed through and through." She can no longer remain in the house of her friend. "This house, her heart's home, was now a wreck to her: nay worse, a hostile citadel." She therefore returns to London, where again she has to suffer the attentions of the men. The offer of marriage which she receives from Mr. Warwick seems to present the opportunity for escape from further humiliation, and without a moment's reflection she accepts it. This sudden marriage is the outcome of her impulsive nature. But they are an ill-assorted pair, the marriage is unhappy and Mr. Warwick, becoming jealous of Diana's friendship with Lord Dannisburgh, brings a matrimonial suit against her. She defends the case successfully, but is then exposed to the risk of a suit for restitution of conjugal rights. She supports herself by writing novels and meets with considerable success, so that she is able to entertain her friends, among whom are many public men and statesmen, who are glad to come to her for counsel, for "she had political and social views of her own." One of them was the young Cabinet Minister, Percy Dacier. "He respected her, gave her no touches of fright and shame. . . . An attempt at a caress would have awakened her view of the whitherward."

Unfortunately the life of a London hostess was beyond her means and she soon got hopelessly into debt; but

## PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CHARACTERS

although she saw her position getting ever more critical, she could not give up her dinner parties, for they were the means whereby she was able to be so helpful to Percy Dacier with her influence and advice. One evening, after the other guests had left, Dacier came back to talk things over with her and in so doing he confided to her a Cabinet secret. She became so enthusiastic about the significance of this news that Dacier seized the favourable opportunity to embrace her for the first time. The quick-lifting bosom under the mask of cold language was evidence of the pain which he inflicted. "Would Percy have humiliated her so if he had respected her?" A sudden thought strikes her in her bewilderment—only money can save her. Does Percy take her for an "adventuress, who was a denounced wife, a wretched author, and on the verge of bankruptcy? . . . And she had a secret worth thousands! . . . She began to tremble as a lightning-flash made visible her fortunes recovered, disgrace averted, hours of peace for composition stretching before her." This new thought dominates all other considerations, and that is the essence of what we term emotion, or rather, of that kind of emotion which takes hold of the mind to such a degree that the faculty of thinking logically is put out of action, or, according to Nahowsky, "the powers of reflection and free judgment are either reduced or even for the time being totally eclipsed." While the one idea rules supreme in the mind all others become modified. Before, she was fully conscious that: "We two are a month in advance of all England," but now she says, "the secret of a day, no more: anybody's secret after some four and twenty hours." How unlogical it is to think that the secret of a day is worth thousands—that does not require much proof, but here it is not a question of logic.

GEORGE MEREDITH

Again, according to Nahlowsky, in a state of emotion "the intensity of impressions is magnified out of all proportion," and further, what Nahlowsky, as a Herbartian, overlooked, these impressions, or rather, the feelings bound up with them, take on the character of an irresistible impulsion to unload themselves in action. For this reason it is psychologically quite right when Diana says to Percy Dacier after the event: "I went . . . like a bullet: I cannot describe it; I was mad . . . I went blindly." All contradictions in her other words and excuses to Percy Dacier are as easy to explain as the deed itself on the ground of emotional distraction. When she comes at last to the consciousness of what she has done—"for the first time since her midnight expedition she felt a sensation of the full weight of the deed. She heard thunder." The case is no proof whatever of a weak understanding. Had she delayed for a single day she would have recovered her mental balance, and she would never have done a thing which she afterwards so earnestly deplored: "Now I see the folly, the baseness. I was blind."

The only objection which, in Wrage's opinion, can be raised to this psychological explanation, is that such intellectual natures are not usually prone to emotional storms: that they are, in fact, immune against them. Experience, however, proves the contrary. Only the sage, the philosopher, who by long discipline of the will has learned to master his emotions, possesses this unshakeable peace of mind. But Diana is not so presented to us; on the contrary, she often falls a prey to impulses, "acts of rashness."

Curle says at the end of his discussion:

So great is my admiration for Meredith's knowledge

## PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CHARACTERS

of women, that even now a doubt touches me that he is aware of possibilities in their psychology undreamt of by me, but I cannot but believe that my view must be the general verdict.

Curle is at least right when he suggests that Meredith is a better psychologist than his critics.

Whether there are objections on æsthetic grounds to making emotion the determining factor in a complicated situation is another question; but Dr. Wrage sees no reason why an author should not be allowed this liberty. What we demand from an author who is entitled to claim the highest position among English psychological novelists, is an exhibition of psychological processes true to life.

Bierig, whose essay is reviewed elsewhere in this book, pointed out that the spontaneous, unconsidered decision was psychologically grounded in the impulsive Irish temperament of the heroine, which is so foreign to English ideas. Meredith himself has given the best answer to critics in his letters to Lady Ulrica Duncombe, in which we may easily recognise Wrage's line of argument.

It must be a strain of Norman or Northumbrian or Anglo-Saxon blood in Ulrica's veins, or the mixture of them, which will not let her be friendly with Diana. Strong imagination is required in the Teuton stock for a tolerance of the Celt. . . . Ulrica says of herself, that she has imagination. Then she ought to be able to enter the breast of a passionate woman, a wife widowed, in love, much needing to be on her guard against the man, ready to fly with him, hating to intrigue; and while she totters in this juncture, assailed by monetary needs, vain of her touch on political secrets, subject in a crisis to a swoon of the mind—mark that, O imaginative lady!

GEORGE MEREDITH

for there are women and noble women who stand unpractised and alone in the world, liable to these attacks, driven for the moment back on their instincts.

Well, well; Cabinet secrets do leak out, and how it happens might be made the subject of a book by itself. Some men, as well as women, cannot keep a secret; Percy Dacier sold the Government for a woman's caress, and she it was who paid the penalty.

Sentimental egoism, or sentimentalism, in short, says Wrage, "has all the precision of a scientific definition. How does the author get this idea, this association of egoism with sentimentalism, two things which at first, to the casual person, seem to have nothing in common? I may here quote Höffding, who in his *Outlines of Psychology* has, as far as I know, recognised more clearly than any one the connection between the two, and has expressed it in the following words:

A feverish incentive may sometimes exist to manifest the feelings in some active form. The feelings become a centre of enjoyment, when they are made the subject of reflexion. Then we have more than the mere feelings alone: the imagination conceives the ego as the possessor of these feelings. This conception of reflexion in the domain of the feelings is what constitutes the peculiar feature of sentimentalism, which, in that sense, is eminently a modern phenomenon. The egoism of sentimentalism is the coquetry, according to which the individual—instead of being altogether given up to his feelings—is taken up with himself as the subject of those feelings.

*The imagination conceives the ego as the possessor of these feelings:* this sentence contains the kernel of the above

#### PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CHARACTERS

observations. The sentimental egoist, for whom sentimentalism has become a trait of character, cannot give himself up artlessly to his feelings; he must involuntarily think of himself at the same time, and enjoy the pleasure of thinking that it is he who is the possessor of these feelings. Here we come in contact at once with one of the most positive marks of that sentimental egoism, which Meredith, with his shrewd psychological perception, has recognised in social life, and artistically presented in his novels."

## *Chapter VI*

JEAN PAUL FRIEDRICH RICHTER,  
1763-1825.

No ONE reads Jean Paul to-day, or would spare the time to look for the real gems in those long fantastic diversions of his, which, as a friend once said, required to be read 400 times before they can be understood.

Yet how he was idolised in the days of his renown, when every new book of his was a sensation for the reading public! How the women loved him; women in the best ranks of society, with no thoughts of jealousy, for they were content to share a heart large enough for all! They treasured locks of his hair so long as he had locks to give, and in default they took wisps from his white spaniel.

His short stories are first-rate, and deserve to live among the best examples of his favourite models, Rabelais, Sterne and Swift. *The Army Chaplain's Journey to Flätz* has been translated into English by Carlyle, and *My Sojourn in St. Nepomuk's Church* is a humorous commentary on the causes and conduct of war in true Erasmian vein. Although fought on the diminutive scale, the grandeur and dignity of the real thing are worthily represented by the two neighbouring villages engaged; dead geese, in contrast to the live ones of the Capitoline Hill, have fired the conflagration, which pursues its course towards a final peace amid all the horrors imaginable, but with very little blood-

JEAN PAUL FRIEDRICH RICHTER

shed; while the author and a travelling bookseller are shut up for safety with the women and a circus elephant in the village church.

In all his stories Jean Paul draws upon his own experiences of rural life in Germany. It is difficult for us to realise what the lack of food transport meant for country people in those days, and what a toll of life it took in winter from all but the strongest constitutions. With few exceptions a life of privation, the barest existence, was the lot of the people; there were no social or political aspirations—national development could hardly be thought of in a country divided up into many independent states, and in all these respects Germany was far behind England and France; for indeed, as Bismarck said, Germany did not begin to recover from the devastation of the Thirty Years War until the middle of the nineteenth century. Jean Paul gives us a picture of the lofty spirit in which this hard and simple life was patiently and cheerfully accepted, but he has no message for the future, no vision of advancement to better things. His relief for all the sordidness of poverty and privation is found in dreams and happy fancies or rewards beyond the grave; imagination can do everything:

It is in this way, he says, as with love and childhood, inspiration reconciles and marries the infirmities of this life with spiritual ideas, just as on the edge of a quiet pool the real tree and its reflection seem to come away from the same root and rise to different skies. . . . And, God must be better pleased with the man who finds everything for the best in the world, than with him who cannot see the smiling face of anything. Is it not gross ingratitude, amid all the delights with which this world is so lavishly supplied, to call our life a pilgrimage of

GEORGE MEREDITH

pain and misery? As far as the needs of life are concerned, I should not know that I was poor, if I had not an old mother, who must not be allowed to know it. . . . What is poverty? Who is the man that whines under it? The pain is but as that of piercing a maiden's ears, and you hang jewels in the wound.

Goethe and Schiller, on the contrary, awakened interest in national history and in the saving virtue of personal exertion for the sake of the community, but their ideas were vague and looking towards a distant future, rather than directed towards the political needs of the existing situation.

Jean Paul was the son of a village pastor living in very straitened circumstances. From his early childhood he was an insatiate reader, borrowing books from generous friends and accumulating a vast collection of notes upon which he drew in his subsequent writings. He anticipated Dr. Roget by compiling for his own use a thesaurus of words and phrases, in which, for example, he had 184 synonyms for the idea of *deterioration*, and for *death* more than 200.

When his father died the family was reduced to extreme poverty and misery, and he returned from Leipzig University to take care of his mother and help to support the family of six persons. They had to live, feed and sleep in a single room, while the mother toiled at her housework or sat night and day at the spinning wheel to earn the price of shoes for the children. For one of the boys these conditions became so insupportable that, to ease the family budget, he took his life:

*Done because we are too menny.*<sup>1</sup>

It was the only help that he could offer, and he stepped

<sup>1</sup> *Jude the Obscure.*

JEAN PAUL FRIEDRICH RICHTER

out into the unknown, like Captain Oates, to try and save the others: not taking them with him, like little Father Time, Hardy's child philosopher of new views about life.

Amid the distractions of this ménage Jean Paul devoted his spare hours to reading and writing; he contributed to his mother's support by teaching the children of some kindly neighbours who were ready in this way to help the family. Like Abraham Lincoln, cheerful and tolerant, careless of his personal appearance, Jean Paul fought his way through these early struggles, and after his mother's death in 1797 the acceptance of some of his books enabled him to leave his country retirement and seek literary contacts elsewhere. With the publication of *Hesperus* he had won his first admirers and set the seal to his reputation. Almost suddenly he became the favourite author of Germany. At the Leipzig Fair his books were more in demand than those of Goethe and Schiller, and he created a sensation, when he appeared, first in Weimar and three years later in Berlin.

M. Paul Stapfer, in his essay, *Humour et Humouristes* (Paris, 1911), writes:

This prodigious success, though only a passing infatuation, remains none the less a surprising phenomenon, which is not explained by certain acknowledged beauties of his work, or by certain propensities which were fashionable at the time. To understand it we must recall the sort of assault which Goethe (taken with Greek art and the beauties of antiquity) was at the moment meditating against the very genius of his nation and his race. Beautiful or ugly, Jean Paul, the Iroquois, as Schiller called him, Jean Paul, the Chinaman, according to Goethe's epigram, or in simple fact, Jean Paul the Teuton, comes forward at the right moment as the head

GEORGE MEREDITH

of Medusa, which old Germany, threatened with the loss of its hereditary character and German spirit, takes for a shield to repel the effort of this neo-hellenism. Never did a barbarian, issuing from the Gothic or Cimmerian mists, resemble less a Greek. Humour, which, according to Hegel, was the final offspring of subjective romance, is opposed to the classic ideal as North Pole to South Pole. Jean Paul versus Goethe meant German versus Greek, a passion for everything vague, indeterminate, unregulated, casting off the chains of ritual and form, measure and discipline. True genius, according to Novalis and the German romantic school, 'disdains the perfection of forms, which are the trappings of talent,' and Goethe, for being too much an artist, is by the same token an inferior poet. Faithful to this truly national doctrine, Jean Paul maintained in his turn that the form is futile, and it is only fundamentals that matter—that is to say, sentiments and truth. He was carried, in fact, a little further than his own convictions, because the party hostile to Goethe, pushed him in this direction.

Through the isolation of his early life Jean Paul never acquired any practical experience of the world, or in fact, any interest in history and the humanities. He was quite ignorant of his defects on the practical side, because he believed that genius possesses all these things by intuition.

This ideal theory recalls the *apologue* so amusingly related by Arvède Barine, of the competition between a Frenchman, an Englishman and a German, to describe a camel. To get his material the Frenchman went to the Zoological Gardens, the Englishman took ship and sailed to the East, while the German shut himself up in his study and sketched the idea of a camel from the depths of his inner consciousness.

JEAN PAUL FRIEDRICH RICHTER

Carlyle's admiration for Jean Paul was genuine, and was perhaps the ground which gained for him some English translators besides Carlyle himself, though few, if any, readers. Carlyle compared him with, or even preferred him to Shakespeare, Milton and Ezekiel, for his gift of sounding, animating and peopling the limitless depths of the invisible world. Longfellow, in his *Hyperion*, declares himself to be no less an admirer; Spencer, too, in his *Essay on Education* makes frequent reference to Richter's "Levana," and evidently holds him in high repute as an authority on the subject.

In his humour Richter is always true to his own maxim, that no one is fit to laugh at other people unless he really loves them. In style, but not in thought, one may compare him with Meredith; there is the same quick fancy, the chasing of similes and metaphors in the farthest corners of the imagination, when

hidden ideas creep out of all the corners of the brain, and every similitude becomes the mother of a whole family of metaphors; she gathers her diverse children around her, and each hangs a picture on the tail of another, like a wandering family of mice.

This is Richter; and Meredith, too, speaks of "a little mouse of a thought which scampered out of one of the chambers of Redworth's head and darted along the passages."

When someone suggested to Meredith that he should use language less difficult and involved, he replied: "Yes, I know, you want me to say, 'she went upstairs, her heart was as heavy as lead,'" and M. Paul Stapfer indicates how matters stood with Jean Paul:

GEORGE MEREDITH

Instead of saying, 'Nicholas, bring me my slippers and give me my night-cap,' Jean Paul, in order to make us listen, creates a row like fifty devils, fires rockets and crackers in our ears and eyes, blinds us, makes us see stars, and would feel it a disgrace if he said the least thing quite simply. Spectacles, for him, are viewing crutches. If he wants to imply that a poet combines coarseness with refinement, he says, 'on the same tongue, the song of the seraph and the jokes of the tavern-keeper are kissing each other.'<sup>1</sup>

To shine in all their enigmatic conciseness, Jean Paul's images must not develop in the way of a logical comparison, showing the train of thought; they must be agglomerated so that the thought enters the figure and loses the marks of connection. Thus, do not say, 'he called him with a whistle, as one would call by pulling a bell cord'; but, 'to call him he pulled the bell cord of his whistle.' And do not say, 'this lady covers herself with her parasol, as the sun half covers itself with the twilight'; but, 'she half covered herself, like the sun, with the twilight of a parasol.' The strangulation of the phrase may go so far as to suppress entirely a necessary link, without which it becomes not only obscure, but absurd and false. Thus, to roll the rock of Sisyphus, and to look for the alchemist's stone, are symbolic of ventures doomed to failure. Of these two symbols Jean Paul makes but one—to roll the alchemist's stone of Sisyphus.

At times Jean Paul is too obviously running up and down his notebooks;

he tosses you allusions without number to things which

<sup>1</sup> Richter's Adam, making love to Eve, says, "Virgin, wilt thou now put into action thy Sternocleidomastoideum, as Sömmering styles the muscle which nods the head, and so express thy 'Yes' when I put to thee the question?"

JEAN PAUL FRIEDRICH RICHTER

you do not know—will never know—a stray line from an unknown Hebrew author, or a physical experiment performed by a scientist in Odessa.

Richter's art lives entirely in the German atmosphere of his day; Meredith's background is English life, not only among the intellectual and social classes, but also with the farmers, the tinkers and the gipsies. Richter's muse is too wanton; a Pegasus prancing and curveting out of all control by any rules of rhyme or rhythm; in fact, he wrote no poetry; his sentiment is too thin, and will not stand Meredith's "conclusive test":

For seed of a nourishing wheat,  
Is it accepted of song?  
Does it sound to the mind through the ear,  
Right sober, pure sane? has it disciplined feet?<sup>1</sup>

Why women were attracted by a writer so difficult to understand may best be explained in his own words:

How differently the women read; with how much more indulgence and facility! When they come to some scientific enigma, they do not begin to shriek and lament about the interruption of their ideas; they just go on quietly reading; they forget and pardon more easily, in that they do not take the trouble to think what it is about.

It was the fashion in the middle of the last century to publish in Germany, England and America collections from Jean Paul's writings: short, disconnected paragraphs; "gems of thought," as one editor remarks, "and brilliant

<sup>1</sup> *The Empty Purse*

GEORGE MEREDITH

analects that no one can afford not to read"; as, for example:

Who has better pursued and revealed nature in its deepest valleys and down to the smallest worm that creeps there, than the twin geniuses of poetry, Homer and Shakespeare? Just as the arts of painting and sculpture work ever in the school of nature, so the greatest poets of all times have been those of her children most devoted to transmitting to her other children, with new features of resemblance, the image of their mother. . . . It is true for the children of art as for the children of ancient Rome, who were made to touch the ground in order that they might learn to speak.

The incongruity between form and supernatural powers opens to the phantasy an inexhaustible field for terror. From this we get our unreasonable horror of small animals, and he must be a bold general who can keep his seat as quietly and undisturbed with an infuriated hornet buzzing in his face as before the booming of a cannon. In dreams one shudders more before a mysterious dwarf than before the figure of a giant.

Schiller is cold; you do not realise that yet, but you will in time. Schiller is ice; he is a glacier in the sunshine, sparkling with heavenly play of colour and purple tones, but get you to the spot and you will find neither glow nor life; a deathly blast will send you flying.

Of Goethe, too, he can be a caustic critic:

We could do better without Goethe's way of opening up his box of tricks, and uncovering the pipes through which

JEAN PAUL FRIEDRICH RICHTER

his bright transparent streams bubble up. A man is only great and poetical when he has not killed his mysteries by unravelment, and no one wants to look at conjuring tricks which are explained.

Descriptions of nature and scenery in Jean Paul's writings may remind us often of Meredith's style, but Jean Paul is more subjective and sentimental. Nature, for him, is like the voice of Heaven, putting beautiful thoughts into our minds; but Meredith, after the publication of his early book of poems, in which this sentimental outlook is also noticeable, avoided the treatment of nature as a playground for the feelings. His descriptions of scenery and weather are more objective, and in their influence on the individual they are an inspiration to action rather than to indulgence in what Adam Brendel calls orgies of unprofitable sentiment. Here is one of Jean Paul's nature pictures:

The evening breeze beat its measureless wings and the little naked lark rested warmly under the breast of its downy mother—a man stood on the mountain and a golden beetle on the gossamer—and the Almighty loved his whole creation.

There is a comfortable feeling of being tucked up and put to sleep by one's guardian angel. It is the prevailing sentiment of Jean Paul's age. Crows and weasels, land rats and water rats, nature red in tooth and claw: such thoughts are not allowed to disturb the picture. Brendel remarks in this connection:

Meredith's diction is undoubtedly influenced by the sketchy, ostentatious, all too heavily loaded style of Jean Paul. They are both discontinuous and allusive in

GEORGE MEREDITH

narrative, often digressing into illustrations, reflections and explanations. Moonlight and twilight frequently brighten the picture of everyday life, though certainly not so much in Meredith's case. The following passage from Jean Paul has the same romantic element as Meredith's twilight imagery, but the latter is firmer and more energetic, prompting more to activity than to helpless sentimental indulgence.

'The moon slowly ascended to her throne in the sky. A delicate glimmer flooded the green world. . . . The earth beamed like a sleeping beauty, turning smilingly in her slumbers to enjoy some dream; but low on the Northern horizon the fiery boisterous day was passing over in an angry storm into the night, and lifting like an earthquake a black mountain of wild cloud rifts. At last the moon had reached her throne and smiled benignly on the world. Then the storm mountains slowly sank and nothing remained but the sweet rosy light reflected against the Eastern sky.'

For comparison Brendel quotes one of Meredith's powerful descriptions of the Alps in *Vittoria*:

Over the mountains above the Adige, the leaden fingers of an advance of the thunder-cloud pushed slowly, and on a sudden a mighty gale sat heaped black on the mountain-top and blew. Down went the heads of the poplars, the river staggered in its leap, the vale was shuddering grey. It was like the transformation in a fairy tale; Beauty had taken her old cloak about her, and bent to calamity. The poplars streamed their length sideways, and in the pauses of the strenuous wind nodded and dashed wildly and white over the dead black water, that waxed in foam and hissed, showing its teeth like a beast enraged.

JEAN PAUL FRIEDRICH RICHTER

We naturally look for comparisons between Jean Paul's *Vorschule der Aesthetik*, or *Introduction to Poetry*, and Meredith's *Essay on the Idea of Comedy*. Both writers cover a good deal of common ground, especially in their examination of the history of the idea<sup>1</sup>. Jean Paul had a conception of a spirit overhead, like Meredith's Comic Spirit, practising on society and correcting it, and Mr. Edward V. Brewer, in the *Journal of English Philology* (Vol. XXIX—1930), notices a number of correspondences between the two essays, which, however, are not sufficient to justify the view that Meredith derived his theory from J. P. Richter.

Jean Paul illustrates his conception of the comic by the story of Don Quixote's squire, Sancho Panza, holding himself suspended over a shallow ditch throughout the night, because he fancied that an abyss yawned beneath him. That no such incident is to be found in Cervantes's story does not affect the argument.

Sancho's action was reasonable from the standpoint of his assumption, and he would have been mad to risk destruction by letting go. Neither by observation nor by the exercise of common sense is he in a position to find out his mistake; the incident may be considered as pathetic rather than comic; it has the comic element of falseness, but Sancho's false impression is due to no fault of his, and to laugh at a good man in adversity is to yield to the primeval impulse of cruelty in human nature. Why then do we laugh? According to Jean Paul we *lend* to Sancho's endeavour our insight and true view of the situation and thereby produce by this contradiction between his action and

<sup>1</sup> E. V. Brewer notes with surprise that Meredith omits to mention Baron Holberg, the "Danish Molière," who is included in Richter's historical survey

GEORGE MEREDITH

our knowledge of the situation ascribed to him an "infinite incongruity."

Later critics have considered this theory of Jean Paul's to be untenable. If we *lend* Sancho Panza our superior knowledge, his action, instead of being comic, simply becomes all the more foolish. Brewer considers that Meredith's theory of the comic has the same element of lending as Jean Paul's, with the essential difference that it is not our *knowledge*, but our *common sense*, which we lend. It is when a person's action is opposed to common sense that he becomes an object of comedy and gets a lesson which he deserves, as, for instance, in the Meredithian sense, when he is covering up his selfish or primitive instincts under a mask of false sentiment. "For you must believe," said Meredith, "that our state of society is founded in common sense, otherwise you will not be struck by the contrasts the Comic Spirit perceives."

H. Meyer, in his essay on "The Comic in George Meredith," overlooks this distinction and maintains that Meredith derived his idea of comedy from Jean Paul's theory; but Sancho Panza is not a pretender, an egoist or sentimentalist; he is one of the "wooden supernumeraries." The silvery laughter and unaccented scorn of the Comic Spirit will pass him by; there is laughter in him, "but it is not illuminating; it is not the laughter of the mind. . . . Incidents of a kind casting ridicule on our unfortunate nature instead of our conventional life, provoke derisive laughter which thwarts the Comic idea."<sup>1</sup>

"Jean Paul Richter," says Meredith, "gives the best edition of the German Comic in the contrast of Siebenkäs with his Lenette. A light of the Comic is in Goethe;

<sup>1</sup> From the *Essay on the Idea of Comedy*.

enough to complete the splendid figure of the man, but no more. . . . The Germans are kings in music, we may say princes in poetry, good speculators in philosophy, and our leaders in scholarship; . . . but the discipline of the Comic Spirit is needful to their growth."

In more than one place Jean Paul gives us his idea of a benevolent and civilising spirit hovering over us, and the following passage from the *Vorschule der Aesthetik* reads almost like an invocation to George Meredith to implement the conception:

For the transition from dramatic to lyric Comedy I find no better medium or wafting breeze than the harlequin. He is the choir in the comedy, and just as in tragedy the choir anticipates the *rôle* of the spectator, floating in lyrical elevation above the performers without being a performer himself, so must harlequin, without himself having a character in the play, be the representative of the Comic Spirit, without passion or interest; he must be the very god of laughter, humour personified. Then, when we get some day a first-class comedy, the author will put at the head of his animal kingdom, in the first day of his world's creation, this harlequin, this vigilant Adam, created for the purpose. But could not this harlequin at the same time be more worthy of society and the stage, if he were a little ennobled on the moral side? Let him remain, I mean, what he was in humour, but become in seriousness what a whole satirist school of Pasquinen was, namely, free, selfless, wild, cynical—in a word, Diogenes of Sinope, come back as Harlequin, and we all will keep him.

The name of Pasquino is associated by people who know Italy through their own visits or through books of travel, with the mutilated statue of an old Roman warrior,

GEORGE MEREDITH

which stands in Rome in the Piazza di Pasquino (named after the statue), near the Piazza Ravona at the corner of the Palace of the Orsini. The Romans were wont to affix to this statue satirical sheets and other products of malicious or humorous wit, as a way of letting off their feelings against unpopular persons, even of the highest rank, and sometimes with a view to rendering ineffective unpopular laws and regulations, by holding them up to contempt or ridicule. Most sources are agreed about the following account of the name Pasquino. In the beginning of the sixteenth century there lived in Rome a shoemaker of this name—or he might have been a tailor, for on this point there is not full agreement—whose shop, on account of his drolleries and malicious or witty comments, was every day a place of assembly for the leisured people, who came, some of them simply to listen, others to join in the spirit of his wit by making passers-by the butt of their jokes.

At length the shoemaker died, to the great sorrow of his supporters and admirers, and his shop, which had fallen into dilapidation, was pulled down, on which occasion there was discovered below the foundations the aforesigned finely executed, but much mutilated statue—the nose and hands in particular were missing. This statue was set up on the place where it was found, and the people, who continued even after the death of the shoemaker, to gather together in the neighbourhood of his shop, believed that in the figure of the mutilated warrior their beloved shoemaker had returned once more to the light of day. The statue was therefore named after him, and was soon put to use for the display of lampoons as already explained.

But the Pasquino statue by itself was not enough to satisfy the spirit of the people, who brought into the game another statue which stood opposite, called Marforio, meaning

perhaps Mars' Forum; or Morforio, from Morpheus. A system grew up of passing questions between these two statues, which introduced a dramatic element into the conception. The interest was increased and curiosity stimulated; never in vain, for the questions posed were short, direct, witty and bitingly answered, because the Roman police were so careless that there was little fear of discovery. Besides, there was not much occasion to take the matter seriously, as the attacks were seldom really malevolent, but rather in the Horatian vein—*ridendo dicere verum*. The line, however, was sometimes overstepped, for Pope Hadrian VI wished to break down the statues and either to throw them in the Tiber or smash them to pieces, because he had been too directly attacked. But a courtier saved them by pointing out to the Pope that Pasquino in the Tiber would not remain dumb, but would cry out as loud as the frogs in the marshes, and would tear up his reputation: the wits, who were already too much given to scoffing, would assemble annually at the place where the Pope had punished their patron, in order to celebrate his anniversary, and the Pope need have no doubt that he would go down to posterity in the blackest colours.

Pope Sixtus V was more cruel than Hadrian; at his accession in 1585 he brought his sister to Rome and gave her a place at court with a princely title. She was, however, the wife of a carpenter, and had previously earned her living as a laundress. Accordingly Pasquino appeared one day clothed in a dirty shirt, and when Marforio asked him why he wore such a filthy garment, he replied, "What else can I do, brother, now that my washer-woman has become a princess?" Sixtus was deeply incensed by this jest, but, hiding his rage, he announced that if the joker would

GEORGE MEREDITH

declare himself, his life would not only be spared, but he would receive a present of 5,000 talers; on the other hand, if his name was disclosed by any one else, he would without appeal be hanged and the informer would receive the money. The unfortunate man fell into the trap and gave himself up. True to his word, Sixtus paid the promised sum and spared his life, but shortly afterwards he had his tongue and both hands cut off, to prevent him from further exercise of his wit, either by word or in writing.

In later times, owing to the misuse to which the statues were put by the Carbonari, Marforio was removed to the Castle of St. Angelo, where he was only able to converse with the Swiss Guards.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in case we have failed to do justice to the humour and all the lovable qualities of this very original German author, we will conclude with an appreciation of Jean Paul from the pen of his great English admirer, Thomas Carlyle:

He has an intellect vehement, rugged, irresistible; crushing in pieces the hardest problems; piercing into the most hidden combinations of things, and grasping the most distant; an imagination vague, sombre, splendid, or appalling; brooding over the abysses of being; wandering through infinitude, and summoning before us, in its dim religious light, shapes of brilliancy, solemnity, or terror: a fancy of exuberance literally unexampled; for it pours its treasures with a lavishness which knows no limit, hanging, like the sun, a jewel on every grass blade, and sowing the earth at large with orient pearls. In humour Richter excels all German authors.

<sup>1</sup> From Ersch and Gruber's *Allgemeine Encyclopädie*: Leipzig, 1818.

## *Chapter VII*

### THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL ACCORDING TO GEORGE MEREDITH

By ADAM BRENDL. MUNICH, 1912

THE author of this paper has made a careful and sympathetic study of Meredith's novels. He begins by quoting some of the opinions of the English critics which are often diametrically opposed, for there has never been an author, he says, about whom opinions are so diverse. (Meredith's affinities with the literature of his day and of the generation which went before him are discussed and illustrated with many interesting examples for comparison, and the paper as a whole presents to German readers a good account of Meredith's style and characteristics. *Sandra Belloni* is chosen for detailed analysis and a synopsis is given of every chapter in this novel. The following is a translation of the concluding section of Brendel's paper:

- Meredith's novels usually present us with a succession of dramatic scenes in a setting of soliloquies, which take the form of a psychological analysis. But even when the action is in full swing, when the characters are engaged in lively verbal encounters, the author cannot resist the impulse to intervene; he breaks in with his own subjective observations, in order to keep the issue within reach of his philosophy and exert his guiding influence upon the reader. One is conscious all the time of the

GEORGE MEREDITH

strong personality of the author, this practised, shrewd, discerning writer, who detects the follies and vagaries of the best of us, and does it to help and educate the mind: his ethical principles are firmly fixed on solid ground, and his robust faith in the steady progress of mankind allows no melancholy or pessimistic feelings to enter, though he points a warning finger to remind us of the sure harvest of our deeds.

Meredith's aim, then, is to present in action his teaching and opinions, bringing them to light through his characters with all the resources of dramatic art. At one time the ideas are for the moment spread out over the field so as to smother and obliterate the persons; at another time the persons stand out again before us with such vividness and striking reality, that we can find nothing like it outside the pages of Shakespeare, the greatest delineator of human character. And what a wealth of variety there is in his gallery of portraits! There is sweet Lucy Desborough, who, like Shakespeare's Juliet, could 'teach the torches to burn bright'; the noble, stout Carinthia, who, like Constance, 'will instruct her sorrows to be proud'; and then again the sentimental, tireless adventuress, the Countess de Saldar, whose one desire is to smuggle herself and her brother Evan Harrington into the best society, and who, in spite of her unprincipled ambition and her vulgar manners, never quite loses the sympathies of the reader; and the eloquent Mrs. Mountstuart, who shoots her witty *bonmots* indiscriminately among the guests at Patterne Hall, and who watches with tender care over her varnished idol Sir Willoughby; and the noble squire himself, bent upon forming his loved ones after the image of himself, and fated to see them, one after the other, flying away like birds out of a cage; and Algernon Blancove, the fool, who buys cigars in order to protect

#### THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

himself from too great a leaning to philanthropy; the circumspect Sir Austin Feverel, who was never seen to laugh, and who, through his well-meant educational system, brings to ruin the one object of his heart's devotion; the phlegmatic Master Gammon, who could not be roused out of his insensibility and taciturnity by anything short of an earthquake. We can see how intimately the author knows and loves all these characters, and how his fine ironic smile, his Comic Spirit, hovers invisibly over them, as a guardian of health, reason and strength. Most of Meredith's leading characters belong to the English aristocracy; the peasants and journeymen, too, are generally attached to the landed nobility. Representatives of finance and industry are not so frequently met with, though there are some examples like the merchant Mr. Pole and the brewer Andrew Cogglesby.

Meredith shows us England of the middle nineteenth century; mighty, world-dominating, self-conscious; not yet palpitating with anxious fears of an impending German invasion, but accepting as the task, which Providence has assigned to the English race, the education and salvation of mankind on English principles. This Imperialism is especially noticeable, though soberly expressed, in *Lord Ormont*. The most important instruments and leaders were then the upper classes—and are they not so even to-day? It was through them that Meredith could best realise his ideal of physical and spiritual culture working together. (A study of Meredith's novels can be recommended to any one who wishes to know England.) His chief male characters are aristocrats, the good and bad in them is brought to light; those noble natures who practise self-restraint, who love the open air and train their bodies in all sports and exercises, but in whose nature, as R. Le Gallienne says, that 'studied

#### GEORGE MEREDITH

brutality' survives, 'for which no one can match an English Aristocrat'; those self-constituted little tyrants, who look on women as market commodities, who are all for sport and when they are hard up would rather sell their wife's jewels than their hunters: how many points of attack they offer to the Comic Spirit, and how sympathetically, in spite of everything, Meredith has handled them!

Meredith's art is the handmaid of his philosophic views and teaching. The dominating themes are the education of young men to become worthy national and cosmopolitan types of culture, and the liberation of women, so as to lay for them foundations of independence which will enable them to become the mothers of a glorious future race. The merit of Meredith's novels is that they are so earnestly written and unfold such a deep philosophy of life: their drawback for the reader is the roughness and frequent obscurity of the style. Meredith rejects every form of conventional phraseology: hackneyed expressions are anathema to him,<sup>1</sup> and his new words and sentences suffer from this process; at first the reader feels a smarting of the eyes and ears, but he soon becomes receptive for Meredith's lively and flowing style. Idlers who merely want a cheap pastime will fling the whole Meredithian library to the flames: one could but warn them: *all hope abandon ye who enter here!* But the earnest seekers after truth, who know something of George Eliot's psychological explorations—Meredith, to be sure, is far more subtle and acute—who are responsive to the stimulating earnestness of a comedy of character like the 'Misanthrope,' and can appreciate the near relationship in some respects of Meredith's thought with Molière's genius, who know,

<sup>1</sup>J. M. Barrie said: "Meredith has plucked the old phrases to pieces: he will have no drowning men who clutch at straws, nor wits who set the table in a roar, nor heroines who kick against the pricks."

#### THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

too, how to appreciate Shakespeare's wholesome love of nature and his captivating women characters, and who finally are not repelled by a difficult, often obscure, but vigorous style resembling Browning's: such readers will absorb Meredith's novels, 'not page by page like the ordinary novel, but line by line'—they belong to that public which the author longed to reach:

'At present, I am aware, an audience impatient for blood and glory scorns the stress I am putting on incidents so minute, a picture so little imposing. An audience will come to whom it will be given to see the elementary machinery at work: who, as it were, from some slight hint of the straws, will feel the winds of March when they do not blow.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Richard Feverel*, Chap. xxv.

### *Chapter VIII*

## THE GREAT SHADDOCK DOGMA

THE shaddock is a kind of grape fruit, named after its first European discoverer, Captain Shaddock. It grows in the East Indies and is known there as "forbidden fruit." That the word should have found its way into the pages of *Richard Feverel* is perhaps one of the best examples of Meredith's talent for digging up strange but apt allusions in far-away places. We read that when Sir Austin Feverel dismissed the saurian Benson:

The heavy butler essayed to speak, but the tremendous blow and the baronet's gesture choked him. At the door he made another effort which shook the rolls of his loose skin pitifully. An impatient signal sent him out dumb,— and Raynham was quit of the one believer in *The Great Shaddock Dogma*.

When, in a riper mood, Meredith revised the novel, and cut out from the original edition some of the more bitterly flavoured apothegms, he seems to have overlooked the fact that he left this doctrinal allusion unintelligible, a disjointed member, like the Piltdown skull, of some lost coherence. The clue is to be found in the first chapter of the original book, where we read that *The Great Shaddock Dogma* was the title which Adrian Harley gave to *The Pilgrim's Scrip*, "on account of its constant and ungenerous citation of the primal slip in Paradise."

#### THE GREAT SHADDOCK DOGMA

*The Pilgrim's Scrip* was a selection of original aphorisms published anonymously by Sir Austin Feverel, "who in this bashful manner gave a bruised heart to the world." If he was ungenerous it was because his best friend had run off with his wife. "He forgave the man . . . the woman he could not forgive . . . she had blackened the world's fair aspect for him." *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* is transitional in the development of Meredith's philosophy; he had outlived his romantic youth, when women were like doves alighting, and the flowers by the wayside were earnest of their goodness; he had not yet learned to be their friend and helper, the champion of their independence: his wife, too, had left him. In *Richard Feverel* there are sentimental women, mischief makers and the charming, inexperienced Lucy, but not one of the splendid types which we meet in the later novels, and *The Pilgrim's Scrip* declares that "Woman will be the last thing civilised by man."

To fasten a life-time's responsibility upon Meredith for this aphorism of the Scientific Humanist must have appealed to G. K. Chesterton as a master-stroke of clever criticism, for he devoted a page and a half to the elaboration of it. He said, for example:

Intellectually it is something worse than false; it is the opposite of what he was always attempting to say. So far from admitting any equality in the sexes, it logically admits that a man may use against a woman any chains or whips he has been in the habit of using against a tiger or a bear. He stood as the special champion of female dignity: but I cannot remember any author, Eastern or Western, who has so calmly assumed that man is the master and woman merely the material, as Meredith really does in this phrase. . . . There is

GEORGE MEREDITH

something about Meredith making us feel that it is not woman he disbelieves in, but civilisation.<sup>1</sup>

That the dramatizings of the Systemmaker represent in any sense Meredith's philosophy on the subject of women is surely an impression too false and absurd to need refuting. The most that could be said is that they testify to a passing mood induced by the domestic crisis through which the author was passing, and English critics in general seem to have overlooked this piece of internal evidence. But let us return to the subject in hand. In a deleted passage of the fourth chapter of *Richard Feverel* we read:

Benson was the Great Shaddock Dogma condensed in a look: potential with silence:—a taciturn hater of Woman; burly, flabby, and implacable. In him Sir Austin had his only faithful believer, and Adrian his solitary rival. When, after *The Pilgrim's Scrip* was published, the fair ladies, its admirers, swarmed down to form a Court at Raynham, they were soon taught to stand in fear of Heavy Benson, who read their object, and, if one by chance got closeted with the Baronet, as they were all seeking to do, a knock was sure to come, and Heavy Benson obtruded his glum person into the room on pressing business, and would not go till he had rescued the prey. As Dragons of old guarded the dwellings of beautiful princesses, Heavy Benson stood sentinel over the Baronet. He held the door to them, as they severally departed, and took their discomfiture to his own praise.

*The Great Shaddock Dogma*, of which St. Augustine of Hippo was the principal author and expounder, might be called the sheet anchor of the medieval woman-hater.

<sup>1</sup> *The Victorian Age in Literature*, by G. K. Chesterton.

#### THE GREAT SHADDOCK DOGMA

It has contributed more than anything else to depress the status of women for a thousand years. It struck them down as the guilt clause of the Versailles Treaty crushed for a time the spirit of Germany. It is expressed in the Latin couplet:

Mala mali malo mala contulit omnia mundo,  
Causa mali tanti foemina sola fuit.

The jaw of the Wicked, One brought all evil upon the World by means of an apple; and the sole cause of so much wrong was woman.

The Tempter practised his arts upon the weaker sex; Adam would have resisted, but he realised that Eve had fallen, and preferred to share her punishment rather than be separated from the one he loved. Milton follows Saint Augustine in *Paradise Lost*:

Against his better knowledge, not deceived,  
But fondly overcome with female charm.

In point of fact it is as difficult to apportion the share of blame between our first parents as it is to specify precisely the kind of fruit which caused their downfall. The "pomum" of the Vulgate, though no doubt intended generically, is responsible for the medieval apple; grape fruit has also claims to consideration. Is not the modern Eve unconsciously following a primeval instinct when she brings a grape fruit home from the market, cuts it into halves and shares it with her husband at the breakfast table?

## *Chapter IX*

### GERMANY AND THE GERMANS IN THE WRITINGS OF GEORGE MEREDITH

By DR. ERNST DICK

THIS article appeared in the *Germanisch-Romanische Monatschrift*, VI Jahrgang, 1914; it is an appreciation of Meredith's acute observation and judgment of German life and culture. Dick gives, for the benefit of German readers, an account of what Meredith has expressed in his novels, not only of criticism, but also of warm admiration for the qualities of the German people.

A long review, he says, has recently appeared in the G-R Monatsschrift entitled "Germany and the Germans in the English novel," which does credit to the author's wide acquaintance with his subject. But the astonishing fact remains, that among all the English novelists who are discussed in this article, no consideration is given to the greatest, George Meredith. That he is the greatest novelist of his century is becoming ever more clearly discerned; in the future it will become even more confidently expressed and believed. The omission of his name in the article is significant; it shows how little Meredith has become known in Germany, and indeed not only to the ordinary public, but to members of the literary profession. A people that has discovered Ibsen, Wilde and Shaw, and a host of lesser

## GERMANY AND THE GERMANS

foreign lights; that has absorbed them and passed the discovery on to the rest of the world, has till now simply disregarded the most worthy of all; the greatest, the one who had most to give us. It is a fact which should make us ponder. A part of the blame may well be attributed to the first translations which appeared; they are so disgracefully bad, that they must have repelled every decent reader. But even later efforts to do justice to Meredith have not succeeded in breaking down the barriers and winning acknowledgment for him; and so we see the depressing, I might almost say discreditable, exhibition, that a well-informed, studious reader of English novels can publish an article on them in which Meredith is not even mentioned, the author who should by right have had the place of honour. He was a man who knew Germany well and admired both land and people. What he has written about them ought to be worth more to Germans of to-day than most of the criticism and praise of other foreign writers.

We read a great deal about Germany in the works of Meredith. *Pictures of the Rhine*, which appeared in the poems of 1851, was the direct fruit of the school years at Neuwied, and the young poet gives expression to the delight which the scenery and fabled history of the Rhine inspired in him.

And this dear land as true a symbol shows,  
While o'er it like a mellow sunset strays  
The legendary splendour of old days,  
In visible, inviolate repose.

Dick reviews the novels and poems to show how Meredith's acquaintance with German art and culture is apparent in his writings. In Harry Richmond's adventures

#### GEORGE MEREDITH

in Germany we meet with characters drawn from the common people. In a German diligence the English boys find themselves "packed between Germans of a size that not even Tacitus had prepared them for. . . . What they heard sounded like a language of the rocks and caves, and roots plucked up, a language of gluttons feasting; the word *ja* was like a door always on the hinge in every mouth." As the company sat at table in the forest inn, "they fed with their heads in their plates, splashed and clattered jaws, without paying us any hospitable attention whatever, so that we had the dish of Lazarus." They were perfectly kind, notwithstanding, and showed themselves ready to help. The first night the boys were accommodated in a woodman's hut and made friends with his two little daughters, whose example gave them a relish for black bread and sour milk. On a later occasion, speaking of girls, the author shows a pleasant inclination when he explains with emphasis, "at any rate they were German girls."

German nobles, too, are prominent in this novel, and among them are some particularly sympathetic characters. Harry's great adventure is nothing less than a love affair with a princess, the only child of a petty German prince, who, though his court and state are small, knows how to rule them with dignity. His sister, the Margravine of Rippau, has intelligence and wit; the other members of the court distinguish themselves by their polish and kindness. As for the princess, it is enough to say that she is one of the finest of Meredith's women; higher praise cannot be given. She is conspicuous above her English sisters by the wide compass of her education, and this only serves to enhance her attractions.

Taken altogether, this book presents a thoroughly attractive picture of German life. Indeed one may say that the

## GERMANY AND THE GERMANS

author's purpose is to give an example by way of contrast for the benefit of his own countrymen. English art is frequently compared with German, and almost always to the disadvantage of the former. The Princess Ottilia says to Harry: "My Professor tells me that it is strange for any of your countrymen to love books"; and in reply to his protest she says, "what we mean is, your society is not penetrated with learning." And further, she says, "you, who were pioneers when the earth had to be shaped for implements and dug for gold, will turn upon us and stop our march . . . we read your writings of us. Your kindness to us is that which passes from nurse to infant; your criticism reminds one of pedagogue and urchin. You make us sorry for our manners and habits, if they are so bad; but most of all you are merry at our simplicity. Not only we say what we feel, we display it. Now, I am so German, this offence is especially mine."

These expressions are worthy of notice in view of the circumstance that the novel was written before 1870, and, in fact, the story belongs to the opening half of the century. Meredith must have been one of the very first Englishmen who discussed and presented in a novel the subject of cultural relations between England and Germany.

Dick speaks of "the wonderful impression" of Bismarck in *The Tragic Comedians*:

He is a fine fellow: and so was my friend the Emperor Tiberius, and so was Richelieu. Napoleon was a fine engine:—there is a difference. Yes, Ironsides is a fine fellow! . . . His ideas are not many. The point to remember is that he is iron on them: he can drive them hard into the density of the globe. He has quick nerves and imagination: he can conjure up, penetrate, and traverse complications—an enemy's plans, all that

GEORGE MEREDITH

the enemy will be able to combine, and the likeliest that he will do. . . . He has, I repeat, imagination; he can project his mind in front of him as far as his reasoning on the possible allows: and that eye of his flashes; and not only flashes, you see it hurling a bolt; it gives me the picture of a Balearic slinger about to whizz the stone: for that eye looks far, and is hard, and is dead certain of its mark—within his practical compass, as I have said.

In *One of Our Conquerors*, which is a criticism of English society and conditions, some sharp though not unfriendly judgments are put into the mouth of a German professor. He is rebuked for breach of the good manners which we expect from a foreign guest, especially when he says that the English grow to horns instead of brains. In Colney Durance's *Serial Tale* a German is the principal character. The satire is directed to "Old England" and touches by the way upon the absurdities of the other Europeans. Of the German representative we read that he is indisputably learned, very argumentative, crashing, arrogant, pedantic, dogmatic, philological and reeking of the Teutonic professor, as a library volume of its leather. With him is his fair-haired, simple-minded daughter Delphica. But this man is the most alive, the most adroit and artful of the company, and he has confederates: behind him stands his Government, and beside him his daughter—while his English competitor rushes into the business with his secretary quite unsuspectingly and unprepared. The general impression conveyed is that the German is in every point more than a match for the Englishman. Meredith had for German learning the very deepest respect; and the light banter that goes with it does not detract from the general disposition of friendliness.

## GERMANY AND THE GERMANS

A mere outline, says Dick, such as is here given, can convey no adequate or just picture. In order to understand and appreciate Meredith's judgments about Germany and Germanism one must first of all know how he has written about his own land and people. A man like Meredith, who was critical to the bone, could not help passing judgments and making reservations. One thing is certain and that is the high esteem which he had for the German people—higher than that of most Englishmen in his time—he wished them well and expected great things of them. "Will this attempt of mine to say so win for him new friends? How Germany would love this noble poet and thinker, if she only knew him! Or is he sent to prove us, and are we going to find that the land of poets and thinkers will not stand the test?"

## *Chapter X*

### OPTIMISTS AND PESSIMISTS

IN *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* there is recounted the meeting of a travelling tinker with a burly young countryman or ploughman who, through a succession of misfortunes, was out of work. They sat together under a hedge, taking shelter from the rain, which both had anticipated and foretold, and therefore welcomed with satisfaction. From the weather theme they fell upon the blessings of tobacco; how it was the poor man's friend, his company, his consolation, his comfort, his refuge at night, his first thought in the morning. On the other side of the hedge the two boys, Richard Feverel and Ripton Thompson—their hearts consumed with a horrible sense of shame for the ignominy which had just been inflicted on them by Farmer Blaize of Belthorpe—looked on and listened to these humble philosophers.

A pipe, they said, was better than a wife, there is no curtain lecturing with a pipe, and it "doan't mak' ye out wi' all the cash Saturday evenin'." You can get rid of it if you want to, said the tinker, and it does not bring repentance after it. The ploughman closed the argument with a clincher. "It doan't eat up half the victuals, your pipe doan't."

Ripton solaced his wretchedness by watching them through the hedge, and he thought it a curious sight to see

## OPTIMISTS AND PESSIMISTS

the tinker stroking a white cat and appealing to her as his missus for a confirmation. The cheery spirit of the tinker was not affected by bad times or wet weather, for somehow, he said, things come round right; and he proceeded to tell how occasion recently called him to Newcastle. Beyond rejecting the idea that he was carrying coals there he chose to be mysterious about the purpose of his visit: it must have been a pressing one to call him so far from his haunts around London—the funeral, perhaps, of a rich relation: at any rate he resolved, on the way back, to see a bit of the sea and embarked aboard a collier. He was as near wrecked, he said, as the Prophet Paul, “but God’s above the devil, and here I am, ye see.”

Such “doctrin’” roused the bitter feelings of Speed-the-Plough, who had first lost one job when Farmer Bollop hanged himself, and then lost his place with Farmer Blaize through being falsely accused of stealing “pilkins.” “God warn’t above the devil then,” he thinks, “not nohow as I can see!” And the tinker agreed that it was a bad case.

“Bad wants paying for,” said the ploughman, and he went on to declare that the only place where Farmer Blaize’s feelings could be touched was in his pocket, which might be done by sticking a Lucifer in his rick some dry windy night. The tinker thought that would be taking the devil’s side of a bad case, and the ploughman observed energetically that if Farmer Blaize was on the other, he should be on that side.

The hope of Raynham thought with him as he lent a “careless half-compelled attention to the dialogue, wherein a common labourer and a travelling tinker had propounded and discussed one of the most ancient theories of transmundane dominion and influence on mundane affairs.”

GEORGE MEREDITH

Meredith is an optimist at heart, though he would probably agree with the Right Honourable H. A. L. Fisher, who in his preface to *A History of Europe* writes:

The fact of progress is written plain and large on the page of history; but progress is not a law of nature. The ground gained by one generation may be lost by the next. The thoughts of men may flow into the channels which lead to disaster and barbarism.

For Meredith's constant theme is that we reap the harvest of our deeds.

Forgetful is green earth; the Gods alone  
Remember everlasting: they strike  
Remorselessly, and ever like for like.  
By their great memories the Gods are known.<sup>1</sup>

Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher, is the Prophet of the Pessimists. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun?

So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.

Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.

<sup>1</sup> *France* (December, 1870).

## OPTIMISTS AND PESSIMISTS

Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

Thomas Hardy puts Sophocles into the witness box:

A life there was  
Among the self-same frail ones—Sophocles—  
Who visioned it too clearly, even the while  
He dubbed the Will the “gods.” “Truly,” said he,  
“Such gross injustice to their own creation  
Burdens the time with mournfulness for us,  
And for themselves with shame.”

From another Greek source Hardy translated the epitaph of a Pessimist:

I'm Smith of Stoke, aged sixty-odd,  
I've lived without a dame  
From youth-time on; and would to God  
My dad had done the same.

In one of his sonnets, referring to the Medici tombs, Michelangelo wrote:

To sleep is good, but to be stone is best,  
Until dishonour and disaster cease.  
I neither see nor hear, being at peace;  
Speak not so loudly, leave me to my rest.

The eighteenth century, called by Carlyle an age of “shams and windy sentimentalities,” was the golden age of the Optimists. It began with Leibnitz, who proved that “all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds”; and everyone thought with Paley that “God Almighty wills

GEORGE MEREDITH

and wishes the happiness of His creatures.” Pope clearly discerned in history “a plot, a rhythm, a predetermined pattern.”

All nature is but art, unknown to thee;  
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;  
All discord, harmony not understood;  
All partial evil, universal good:  
And, spite of pride, in erring reason’s spite,  
One truth is clear, whatever is, is right.

It needed an earthquake to shatter this complacency. On the first of November, 1755, occurred the Lisbon disaster, in which the greater part of the city was destroyed and 40,000 people lost their lives. Goethe, in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, tells how this catastrophe shocked the civilised world, keeping both preachers and philosophers busy with cosmological problems for many a day, trying to adjust their outlook to such a tragic manifestation of hidden forces.

The English preachers saw in it a punishment for Popish superstition, while the Portuguese purged themselves from Protestant contamination. According to Voltaire, “the sages of that country could think of no means more effectual to preserve the kingdom from utter ruin than to entertain the people with an *auto-da-fé*, it having been decided by the University of Coimbra that the burning of a few people alive by a slow fire, and with great ceremony, is an infallible secret to prevent earthquakes.”

Voltaire’s *Candide* and Dr. Johnson’s *Rasselas* both appeared in 1759. The terrible misfortunes which overtook everyone in *Candide* were intended to explode the theory of the best of all possible worlds, but *Rasselas*

## OPTIMISTS AND PESSIMISTS

protests: "you fall into the common errors of exaggerated declamation, by producing, in a familiar disquisition, examples of national calamities and scenes of extensive misery which are found in books rather than in the world, and which, as they are horrid, are ordained to be rare."

Rasselas finds no conclusive answer to the riddle of existence, and elsewhere the learned Doctor is inclined to be frivolous:

Hermit hoar, in solemn cell  
Wearing out life's evening gray,  
Smite thy bosom, sage, and tell,  
What is bliss? and which the way?  
Thus I spoke, and speaking sigh'd;  
Scarce repress'd the starting tear;  
When the smiling sage reply'd,  
Come, my lad, and drink some beer.

But Voltaire remained to the end unshaken in his pessimism. "After eighty years of experience," he said, "I accept the fact with resignation that flies are born to be eaten by spiders and mankind to be devoured by vexation."

We may read the motto inscribed on Goethe's banner in the conclusion of the beautiful prayer which Iphigenie addresses to Diana:

Denn die Unsterblichen lieben der Menschen  
Weitverbreitete gute Geschlechter,  
Und Sie fristen das flüchtige Leben  
Gerne dem Sterblichen, wollen ihm gerne  
Ihres eigenen, ewigen Himmels  
Mitgeniessendes fröhliches Anschau'n  
Eine Weile gönnen und lassen.

GEORGE MEREDITH

Men of goodwill, know you,  
Races o'er all the Earth; how the Gods love you!  
Yea, the Immortal Ones gladly bestow on you  
Life's fleeting portion:  
Gladly they share with you, e'en for a season,  
Their own eternal fellowship, bliss and  
Heavenly gaiety.

Through the stately forest of Goethe's polysyllables  
Thomas Hardy's spirit cuts like an East Wind:

What do you think of it, Moon,  
As you go?  
Is life much or no?  
O, I think of it, often think of it  
As a show,  
God ought surely to shut up soon.

It was Fichte who said that according to the man, so is  
the system which he adopts; or, as Mrs. Poyser put it,

Some folks' tongues are like the clocks as run on  
striking, not to tell you the time o' the day, but because  
there is summat wrong in their inside.

If it is some perilous stuff, which weighs upon the heart,  
then

out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

## *Chapter XI*

### GEORGE MEREDITH'S ART IN THE NOVEL

By PHIL. ARONSTEIN

(*Die Neueren Sprachen*, Vol. XXVI, 1918)

THE novel is the latest born product of literary art; its history does not begin until the eighteenth century, when it appeared in England. Anything before that date is prehistoric, or stands in relation to the finished form of the novel, much as the mysteries and moralities to the drama. At any rate it was unknown in classic literature; it was the eventual outcome of the printed book, which could be taken and enjoyed by a reader in seclusion. That it has no classic prototypes, as the drama had, is a fact of great importance. Theories of art and scientific æsthetics have not busied themselves very much with it, nor exercised influence upon its growth and formation. Its growth has been unconscious like the expansion of England which, according to Seeley, has conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absentmindedness.

Novels were wont at first to appear as serials in the magazines, but with the invention of the circulating library they went into bondage to the Philistines, just as the English Renaissance drama sold itself to Philip Henslowe, the crafty, ignorant money-lender, who, as theatre

GEORGE MEREDITH

proprietor and paymaster of the easy-going actors and playwrights, exercised so powerful an influence on dramatic art. But what was that in comparison with Mudie's Circulating Library in London and its numerous branches in the country, which dominated the literary market and compelled authors to comply with the demands of the well-to-do middle classes and their ideal of "respectability"; to observe the proprieties and write nothing which could corrupt the young, and especially the daughters of the house? The result was that the representation of life became shallow and untrue, the novel serving only to amuse and stir the feelings. The one thing to be avoided by an author, as tantamount to certain failure, was anything which would offend Mrs. Grundy or public opinion and thereby lead to rejection by Mudie's. So, while production increased, the artistic quality of the novel fell, and at the same time the repressed taste for frivolity, piquancy and indecency found ample scope in the detailed press reports of divorce court proceedings and in the gossip of the so-called society papers.

Two authors led a reaction against this degeneration of the novel: George Meredith and Thomas Hardy; the latter, though twelve years younger, coming in fact much sooner to fame. Meredith sets out his views on the art of the novel in the first chapter of *Diana*. The novel, he says, will not come of age until it becomes philosophical. Novelists are really tired of their wooden puppets and would gladly throw themselves into the breach, if only readers would gather to the philosophical colours. If the novel will not make terms with philosophy it is doomed to extinction in spite of the number of its followers. "For I think," he writes to an American correspondent (G. P.

#### GEORGE MEREDITH'S ART

Baker, July 22, 1887), "that all right use of life, and the one secret of life, is to pave ways for the firmer footing of those who succeed us. . . . Close knowledge of our fellows, discernment of the laws of existence, these lead to great civilisation. I have supposed that the novel, exposing and illustrating the natural history of man, may help us to such sustaining roadside gifts."

The novel, says Meredith in *The Amazing Marriage*, must present events to the understanding in their consequence like a logical proof, and that in revelation of character. Now what kind of characters are these, and especially the principals, the protagonists and heroes of the novels? In a well-known passage of *Wilhelm Meister* Goethe speaks of the difference between the hero of a drama and of a novel. In a novel opinions and events are the main objects of presentation, but in drama characters and deeds. The novel must go slowly and the disposition of the principal characters must in some way or other hold up the development of the whole to a conclusion. The drama must hurry, and the role of the principal actor is to press towards the *dénouement* against the obstacles which are holding it back. The hero of a novel must be a victim, or at least not active in any high degree; but from a dramatic hero activities and accomplishments are demanded. Grandison, Clarissa, Pamela, the Vicar of Wakefield, Tom Jones himself: where they are not passive are at least retarding persons, and all events are in a sense modelled according to their dispositions. In the drama the hero models nothing according to himself. Everything is against him and he clears away the obstacles in his path or falls a victim to them.

The immortal hero, who in spite of all emptiness and unreality was popular with the public and was more or less

GEORGE MEREDITH

represented in the novels of Scott, Bulwer Lytton and Disraeli, became the object of satire in Thackeray's parodies, and for contrast he calls *Vanity Fair* a novel without a hero. Meredith says in *Beauchamp's Career* that the superhuman beauty of the hero has quite destroyed public belief in the existence of a hero at all and led to an attack of republicanism in the nursery and a dethronement of the leading doll. In modern realistic English novels we find these heroes replaced by everyday people who are intentionally represented as weak and characterless: it is the *milieu* rather than the personality which predominates in the novels of Trollope and Gissing, and later of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy. With Thomas Hardy, too, Fate is the hero, who pulverises the poor creature entangled in its meshes through bad luck or a fault in his character. Meredith is an optimist, so with him the hero finds a place once more. His heroes are, as he says, real if unusual people, interesting important personalities, who win through because they are active souls, and though whipped by the storm they struggle onward and upward.

In *Beauchamp's Career* Meredith describes a young man unusually gifted in mind and character, a sprig of aristocracy, a brilliant and brave officer, who is led by his idealism to fight and suffer for the cause of the people. He is no passionless paragon of perfection, but humanly imperfect, his heart too easily inflamed, his actions too unpremeditated. On his way through life he finds, not victory and triumph, and not on the other hand persecution and martyrdom, but hatred from those of his own social circle, mocking and scorn, stupidity, misunderstanding and misrepresentation—and in the end he achieves little or nothing. Nevil Beauchamp, as a hero, is a type which in the inexhaustible range of English fiction is very seldom met with, not

#### GEORGE MEREDITH'S ART

because the type is rare in real life—England has always been a fertile soil for idealists of every complexion—but because a strong faith in ideals is not prominent among English people, they are not inclined to abstract thought. We may perhaps venture to say that in the character of this hero there is something German.

Especially, however, is Meredith an innovator in the representation of women. He took a lively interest in the movement of the nineteenth century for their emancipation, proclaiming their right not only to equality in education, admission to all professions and economic independence, but also to the Parliamentary vote, easier divorce, and more merciful treatment of isolated moral lapses. It was for him not merely a women's question but before all things something which concerned the welfare of men and cultural progress. The position of women, he says, is the test of our civilisation, and if their position is so frightfully brutal it is because there are still so many primitive men who will have their pasture.

In *Richard Feverel* Meredith created Lucy Feverel, the type so well known in world literature of the submissive wife. But the conviction grew upon him that this ideal was wrong, and he put another type in the place of the loving, tractable, self-sacrificing, anxious wife and mother, who was the ideal of Shakespeare and Milton, whom we find in Goethe and Schiller; whose obverse side is the coquette trying with feline arts, as Meredith says, to win influence and power, which she is not allowed to pursue openly. A development of her natural gifts—"more brain," which is what she needs—will raise both her and the man to a higher level.

Meredith has embodied his ideal in some superb women characters; there is probably nothing like them elsewhere

#### GEORGE MEREDITH

in English novels. His nearest colleague in this field is the great Norwegian dramatist, whose women, however, like Nora, the Lady from the Sea, Hedda Gabler, etc., give one rather the impression of being clever embodied theses, while Meredith's heroines, like his heroes, though unusual, are yet real creatures of flesh and blood.

In general, Meredith's genius, in spite of many points of contact, contrasts strongly with the philanthropic art of Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot, which dominated the so-called Victorian era. The Victorian novel, which in its continuators Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy, etc., lives on to-day, examines life not merely in order to know it, but to improve and liberate it; to make it fairer and more moral. It is democratic-humanitarian, aristocratic, satirical: in a word, improving. It is the expression and the mirror of a period of external reforms, democratic changes in politics, removal of restrictions and abuses; a period, in fact, of many movements for social betterment. Herein lies its strength and also its limitations. It deals with classes, occupations, interests, aspirations, and seldom or only imperfectly studies the humanity itself, which is what interested Meredith most, and indeed not in hidden corners, or like Hardy far from the madding crowd, but on life's highways. His characters may be aristocrats, but they are at the same time representatives of average people and of the motives and passions deeply rooted in human nature. In form, Meredith's art shows no advance upon the traditional formlessness of the English novel; but in spite of imperfections he stands, by reason of the content and the significance of his work, in the forefront of late nineteenth century writers, for he showed the way to a higher development of the novelist's art.

## Chapter XII

### ORLANDO FURIOSO

Nay nay but of truthe  
I know now what it is. I doe think I had a booke  
Of Orlando Furioso, whereon I loved to looke,  
As oft as I had leysure with passyng great delyte.

THIS early notice of Ariosto's poem in English literature occurs in *The Bugbears*, a pre-Shakespearean comedy of 1561 or not much later; one of three which were saved when John Warburton's collection of fifty-five rare plays was burnt, as he says, through his own carelessness and the ignorance of Betsy Baker, his servant. It is a tribute more gracious than the one which Ariosto received from his patron, Cardinal Hippolyte d'Este, to whom the poem was dedicated.

The first edition, published in April, 1516, did not receive from the Cardinal the warmth of acknowledgement which Ariosto expected, and to which he felt entitled. There is a celebrated story, the authenticity of which cannot be proved, of the poet returning from Rome to Ferrara a few weeks after the publication of his book. He expected to receive from his master, not only compliments and thanks, but doubtless also more substantial benefits, which would dispense him for the future from a service, which was tedious and little suited to his aptitudes and tastes. But all that Hippolyte could

GEORGE MEREDITH

find to say was, “ Messire Ludovico, where in the Devil’s name have you been to look for all these absurdities? ” It is hard for a poet, in love with his work, to hear it treated with such haughty disdain; but we may suppose that Ariosto was above all discouraged by the idea that he had to begin everything over again, that he had gained nothing, but would have to resume the old life of a courier—of a galley slave, one might almost say. That was not what he expected in exchange for his poem, composed to celebrate the glory of the Princes of Este and for their diversion.<sup>1</sup>

Roger and Bradamante, the lovers of the poem, are the reputed founders of the house of Este, from whom not only our Queen Mary of Modena could claim descent, but Queen Victoria too.

Sir John Harington, a vivacious young gentleman at the court of Queen Elizabeth, translated the indelicate story of Joconde from the *Orlando* and passed it round among the ladies of the court, although it is a story which Ariosto expressly advised the ladies to skip. By their mischievous contrivance, no doubt, it found its way into the hands of the Queen, who banished Sir John from court and set him the penance of translating the whole poem into English heroic verse.

Justice has not been done to this translation, and especially by the Dictionary of National Biography, according to which it bears signs of having been hastily produced, and is rather a paraphrase than a translation.

William Hazlitt more justly says that “ Harington’s claim to a niche in the series of poets is founded upon his fine translation of Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, a version in

<sup>1</sup> From *L’Arioste*, by Henri Hanvette: Bibliothèque littéraire de la Renaissance. 1927.

## ORLANDO FURIOSO

the true spirit of the original"; and according to Henry Morley, Harington, without being a great poet, "rhymed easily, and had a ready pen. His version of *Orlando* attempts no subtleties of skill in the exact rendering of lines and stanzas; but as a reproduction of the whole poem for English readers it was, and is a very pleasant book."

What the pundits quibble about is the freedom which Harington allowed himself. In many of the verses he does not follow the words or the order of the original. He gives his own turn freely to the contents, but never violates the real meaning. Having, for example, to translate a verse containing a list of Italian flowers, he chooses names of English herbs and flowers, with a skilful suggestion of their symbolic meaning:

No weeds or fruitlesse trees are in this place,  
But herbs whose vertues are of highest price,  
As soveraigne sage, and thrift, and herbe of grace,  
And time, which well bestowed maketh wise,  
And lowly patience, proud thoughts to abase,  
And hearts ease, that can never grow with vice,  
These are the herbs that in this garden grew,  
Whose vertues do their beauties still renew.

X, 61.

Harington adds his own detailed explanations and commentaries at the end of every canto, supplying thereby much useful help and information. He treats Ariosto very seriously as a moral teacher, whose reflections "would beseeme any pulpit, being full of Christian exhortation, doctrine and example." He admits that some of the verses, if tried in the balance, will be found "many graines too light," but he gives a "brief Allegorie," which he places at the end of the book, "as it were for a farewell, as men do at a great dinner, in which they have almost surfetted

GEORGE MEREDITH

upon sundrie sorts of meats, more delicate then wholsome, yet in the end close up their stomakes with a peece of a Quince, or strengthen and helpe their digestion with a cuppe of Sacke; whereas to a temperate feeder upon wholsome meats, both of them are superfluous."

Sir John Harington has the same gift as James McKechnie for interpreting allegories, and of course they are both right; for in the *Orlando* as well as in *Shagpat* the story of a young man storming Olympus or pursuing the object of his desires, taking lessons and impressions from the buffeting which he receives, becomes an allegory in the hands of a writer with sympathy and knowledge. Passion, presumption, self-indulgence, take the form of men or symbolic animals, lying in wait for the over-confident youth, to dig a pit for his soul: till through the constancy and devotion of his betrothed he is rescued and led on to victory.

The *Orlando Furioso* is not an epic, although it has for a background the siege of Paris by the Saracens and its defence by the venerable Emperor Charlemagne, and many of the episodes remind us of the siege of Troy, as, for instance, when Orlando, like Achilles, leaves the camp, and later slays the African king. The Saracens, too, like the Greeks, advance alternately to storm the city and retire discomfited to their ships. But the court poet of Ferrara has not the fervour, the didactic purpose or the national feeling, to make more than a background of these epic elements.

It is not a moral tale, although the theme which supplies the title is the moral degradation of Orlando, nephew of the Emperor and champion of the Church, the wisest, most chivalrous and upright, most courageous of all the heroes of romance. He has brought the Eastern Princess Angelica

## ORLANDO FURIOSO

safely through India, Media, Tartary and across the Pyrenees; treating her always with a respect and restraint which, to Ariosto, border on the incredible; but now in the confusion of the battle, in which the Christians were routed, she has fled and is nowhere to be found. In the critical hour, when his help is vitally needed to drive the Saracens from the gates of Paris, Orlando deserts his uncle to go in search of Angelica. Through all the stages of jealousy and despair he sinks, like another Nebuchadnezzar, to the condition of the brutes, until at last his wits are recovered through the help of the Evangelist St. John and the heroic deeds of the English Duke Astolpho. Into this tale of passion and suffering the poet has poured his own blood and tears, for he, too, as he says, is weak and has loved to distraction. The beauty of his fair mistress has ensnared his wits and his case is little better than Orlando's.

And it is not a romance, although the love story of Roger and Bradamante occupies the centre of the picture and has all the romantic elements of danger and difficulty, being only at last brought to a happy conclusion after every conceivable complication has been resolved.

The moral and the romance, as well as the epic story, are only parts of something bigger: a picture of the world and society as Ariosto looks upon it with the detachment of a spectator. He propounds no philosophy, and we are tempted to think that he is pursuing only art for art's sake: that the stars, which shine so brightly in his sky, are put there just like pins in a pincushion.<sup>1</sup> Yet it was his life's work, and he was constantly seeking peace and retirement, so that he might devote his time to it; constantly correcting, improving, adding to it.

<sup>1</sup> A simile used by Croce, and before him by Manzoni (*I Promessi Sposi*, Chap. xxxvii).

GEORGE MEREDITH

Benedetto Croce, whose essay on Ariosto has been translated into English by Douglas Ainslie, contests the view of De Sanctis that Ariosto has no subjective content to express, no sentimental or passionate motive, no idea become sentiment or passion, but pursues the sole end of art, singing for singing's sake, representing for representation's sake, elaborating pure form, and satisfying the one end of realising his own dreams. The truth is, on the contrary, that by the side of his powerful thoughts and feelings for women, he had another love, another pursuit, the *quest of harmony*: of what Meredith calls *the music of the meaning of accord*. He was the Lark Ascending:

For singing till his heaven fills,  
'Tis love of earth that he instils.

Croce's words are something like a paraphrase of this: "It could be said of the irony of Ariosto, that it is like the eye of God, who looks upon the movement of creation, of all creation, loving all things equally, good and evil, the very great and the very small in man and in the grain of sand, because he has made it all, and finds in it nought but motion itself, eternal dialectic, rhythm and harmony."

Croce's words, too, read something like a paraphrase of passages in Meredith's *Essay on the Idea of Comedy*. This line of thought is further confirmed by Mr. Edmund G. Gardner's remarks in *The King of Court Poets* (1906):

That the Comic Spirit has presided over the composition of the *Orlando Furioso* may not be denied, nor that this 'sword of Common Sense,' as the greatest of living novelists has styled it, cuts through many a romantic reputation and high-sounding tale. . . . Throughout the poem, earnestness and irony are inimitably blended

## ORLANDO FURIOSO

together; the Comic Muse is afraid, it would seem, to trust her Tragic sister too far out of her sight. . . . The *Orlando Furioso* is, indeed, in many respects a mirror held up to the swiftly passing society of the Cinquecento.

As the opening line implies, women occupy the foremost places in the poem. In spite of his famous satire on marriage, Messer Lodovico strenuously protests himself an ardent admirer and zealous champion of the fair sex.

“Comedy,” says Meredith, “comes of some degree of social equality of the sexes—of the mind hovering above congregated men and women. Where women are on the road to an equal footing with men, in attainments and in liberty—in what they have won for themselves, and what has been granted them by a fair civilisation—there . . . pure Comedy flourishes, and is, as it would help them to be, the sweetest of diversions, the wisest of delightful companions.” These conditions existed in the society of the Italian Renaissance—though morals might have been as bad as our own to-day, and the conduct of some of the best people in the *Orlando* was quite primitive—but women were well educated; they enjoyed a fair measure of freedom and independence; Ariosto stoutly upholds their claim to full social equality with men; the women he praises were not only poets themselves but patrons of literature and art: among them Lucretia, Duchess of Ferrara, Isabella, Duchess of Mantua, and Vittoria Colonna, the dear friend of Michelangelo.

His heroines, like the Christian Bradamante and the heathen Marphise, wear male armour and unhorse many a doughty knight of the stronger sex. The women of antiquity, says Ariosto, were not only famous for their skill

GEORGE MEREDITH

and practice in martial arts, but also in the works of the sacred muses; while Harpalyce and Camilla are renowned for their knowledge of war, Sappho and Corinne have acquired immortal celebrity by their wit. It is the envy and ignorance of the chroniclers which have deprived women of the honours which are their due.

If the women of antiquity had themselves transmitted to posterity the recital of their glorious actions, instead of begging the help of the chroniclers, whose disposition is so envious and jealous that they are always disposed to hide the good that they can declare and to publish all the bad things that they know—the names of these worthy women would have come down to us, and they would have shone with a brilliance to which the renown of men could never attain.

“Women,” says Ariosto again, “arrive at decisions by intuition, and often the resolutions which they make are wiser than if they had been long debated. It is a special privilege of theirs, a bounty which is their own and which, with so many other precious gifts, they have received from Heaven. It is otherwise with men, who rarely form good resolutions without having pondered over them at length and devoted much time to their deliberation.”

There should be strict equality between the sexes in the judgment of moral conduct. “Is a woman to be blamed or punished,” says Count Renaud, “for having had one or more lovers, while a man may give way to all his passions, may even boast of it, without incurring any punishment? This inequality in the law is a real injustice to women, and I hope to show, with the help of God, that it is a very wrong thing to have tolerated this abuse for so long.” These words of Renaud met with universal assent, and the

## ORLANDO FURIOSO

monks of Scotland agreed that the ancients had been very unjust and cruel to enunciate a law so barbarous.

Ariosto's love stories sometimes have their perfect consummation in matrimonial bliss, but more often he treats love as a sport, in which it is the hunter who suffers most cruelly. "What wounds," he says, "are inflicted by the God of Love! I have had the greatest share of them myself, and it is my misfortune to remember all too well what I have suffered. You can believe me when I say that, if some of the sorrows of love are sweet and easy, there are others which are cruel and hard. . . . For my part, though among all the women I have loved till now I have never found one faithful, I will not go so far as to say that all are ungrateful and untrue; I rather blame my bad luck. There are to-day, and there have been in the past, many who have been above reproach; it is just my own misfortune that, if there is one jade among three hundred, she has fallen to my lot.

"I hope, before I die, before indeed my hairs turn gray, to follow up my search until I may be able to say that I have found a woman one can trust. If that happens to me (and I do not give up hope), I shall never cease to praise her virtue: in celebration of her glory I shall devote my tongue, my pen, my poetry and my prose."

Here he is thinking of the beautiful widow, Alessandra Benucci, who at first responded so coldly to his attentions, but with whom, during the later years of his life, he was happily united. "For," he says, "I have always been of opinion, and many times I have said so, that without a wife by his side no man can attain perfect goodness or live without sin" (Satire V, v. 13). Meredith has said the same thing in *The Amazing Marriage*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See page 205.

GEORGE MEREDITH

Other sources might be quoted to support the suggestion which we get from Croce and Gardner of a spiritual kinship between Ariosto and Meredith. It is recorded of the Italian poet that he was fond of pleasant society, gay, full of lively wit, and he shone especially among beautiful and intellectual women. He was tall, well-built and powerful; active and alert; a noted walker, and if he could have turned up at Box Hill in the days of Leslie Stephen and his Sunday Tramps, he would certainly have received a hearty welcome. One day, lacking inspiration in the house, he set out from Carpi in slippers and dressing gown, his mind engaged upon some addition or re-polishing of his poem, and it was not until he had walked half-way to Ferrara that he woke up to the situation. He then completed the journey, a distance of nearly fifty miles.

The *Orlando Furioso* found many admirers in seventeenth-century England, and among them Milton, who, like Chaucer before him, drew inspiration from his visit to Italy. The Horatian torch passes on from Ariosto to Milton, when he invokes the Heavenly Muse to pursue

Cosa non detta in prosa mai nè in rima:

Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme:

and there are allusions to the *Orlando* in *Paradise Regained*; the Hippogriff, for example, makes one of its first appearances here in English literature.

Both poets have glimpses of a happier world before we were all driven mad by the intrusion of women. Thus Milton's Adam questions the all-wise dispensation:

Oh! why did God,  
Creator wise, that peopled highest heav'n  
With spirits masculine, create at last

### ORLANDO FURIOSO

This novelty on earth, this fair defect  
Of nature, and not fill the world at once  
With men as angels without feminine,  
Or find some other way to generate  
Mankind? This mischief had not then befall'n,  
And more that shall befall, innumerable  
Disturbances on earth through female snares;

and Ariosto's Saracen King Rodomont works himself into his famous "rodomontade" about the perverse sex, without whom man would be happy. God has produced woman with the same purpose as he made the venomous serpent, the wolf, the bear, and as he has filled the air with mosquitoes, wasps, gadflies and gnats. Why has a beneficent Nature introduced woman, when she might have carried on the species by some process of grafting?

See how a clever man will graft  
The pears and plums! I deem his craft  
    Ideal propagation.  
Then why is Nature so inclined  
As to perpetuate mankind  
    By female ministrations?  
She needs must bring the women in,  
Because she too is feminine.

XXVII, 120.

The men of the eighteenth century seem to have discovered something congenial in the spirit of the *Orlando*. In his book on the *Orlando Furioso* (1924), the Rev. E. W. Edwards says:

Pope made use of it; Johnson, needless to say, had read it; and in 1731, Rolli found it worth while to publish an edition in London, a fact which testifies to a

GEORGE MEREDITH

fairly large English demand for the poem. Charles Fox early fell in love with it and remained faithful all his life. Sir Walter Scott is known to have read the *Orlando Furioso* at frequent intervals for many years, and, in youth at any rate, to have thought it superior to Homer. Byron's obligations were greater.

Then, rather suddenly, there comes a change. Browning and Tennyson were both lovers of things Italian, but neither of them appears to have felt any interest in Ariosto, and it is certain that he was not one of their favourites: it may be said that it would probably be difficult to find a single prominent and representative Victorian who had any affection for, or even knowledge of, the *Orlando Furioso*.

It is strange that the writer of these lines should have overlooked George Meredith; there is plenty of evidence to prove that Meredith was not only well acquainted with the *Orlando Furioso*, but also held it in warm affection. As early as 1850 he says in a letter to his publishers: "you will see that . . . I have followed the idea of Ariosto"; which implies, too, an acquaintance with the poet on the part of his correspondent. Ariosto's influence may be traced here and there in Meredith's writings, and *The Shaving of Shagpat*, though clothed in Arabian dress, is in thought and allegory much closer to the *Orlando*.

The theme which runs through the poem, gathering all its tangled threads together, is the love and devotion of the true and faithful Bradamante for her erring and light-minded African knight Roger, a youth who through weakness and folly, falls a victim to strange enchantments, undergoing many wanderings and tribulations until he is at last united to the brave daughter of Duke Aymon.

## ORLANDO FURIOSO

Mounted on Hippogriff, who symbolises false ideas of love, he is carried across the world to the castle of the wicked enchantress Alcine, who, without hook or net, catches fishes, and these denote the different conditions of men who are snared by vice: the whale, for instance, is a false illusion of happiness. To talk of having a “whale of a time,” is, after all, not so ultra-modern. The strange crew of hideous mien and monstrous shape which attacks Roger near the walls of Alcine’s city, is a troop of vices, led by their captain Indolence,

with monstrous paunch and bloated face;  
Who a slow tortoise for a horse bestrode.

VI, 63, tr. by W. S. Rose.

Many of these cruel, rapacious monsters are sons of Eriphile, who holds the bridge and attacks, cheats or robs the travellers who wish to cross over. She is Avarice, and thus, as in the *Shagpat*, virtues and vices are personified: as they are, too, in the romances from which Ariosto drew his material.

Roger arrives at length at the castle of the good fairy Logistille, who represents Reason. She lives in a castle so strong and so magnificent that its like has never been seen, nor will be seen by mortal eye. The walls are more precious than if they were made of diamonds and garnets. The distinguishing quality of these walls, so rich and brilliant, is that a man may look in them and see the secrets of his heart. There he sees his virtues and his vices represented as they are; whereby he becomes immune from flattery and impervious to unmerited censure. Looking into this brilliant mirror he learns to know himself and to become more prudent.

GEORGE MEREDITH

Logistille puts a bridle in the mouth of Hippogriff and shows Roger how to tame and guide the creature. On his finger is the ring of Common Sense, "our surest gift,"<sup>1</sup> which enables him to see things as they are. But he is only half-enlightened,

still doomed to fret,  
To hurl at vanities, to drift in shame.<sup>1</sup>

In the moment when he is pursuing Angelica with his unlawful attentions, he gives her the ring, and it assists her to escape. It is for want of this ring that fortune turned against the Saracen King, Agramant.

Roger was surely the model for Shibli Bagarag, and Bradamante the devoted Noorna. Whichever story we read, we shall find that comparisons with the other will help our understanding. Noorna's gift of transformation from ugly to beautiful is possessed in a sense inverse by Alcine; whose "face became pale, wrinkled, skinny, her hair white and thin; her stature shrank and the teeth fell out of her mouth. She appeared to have lived longer than Hecuba, longer than the sybil of Cumae, longer than all the women who have lived to the greatest old age."<sup>2</sup>

Noorna was "a woman, old, wrinkled, a very crone, with but room for the drawing of a thread between her nose and her chin; she was, as is cited of them who betray the doings of Time,

Wrinkled at the rind, and overripe at the core,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Ode to the Comic Spirit*.

<sup>2</sup> Spenser's Duenna is an imitation of Alcine:

A loathly wrinkled hag, ill favour'd old,  
Her crafty head was altogether bald—  
Was overgrown with scurf and filthy scald,  
Her teeth out of her rotten gums were fled.

## ORLANDO FURIOSO

and every part of her nodded and shook like a tree sapped by the waters, and her joints were sharp as the hind-legs of a grasshopper; she was indeed one close-wrecked upon the rocks of Time.”<sup>1</sup>

But most remarkable of all, when we read of Shagpat’s hair and of that one hair in his head, the “Identical,” is the story of Astolphe and the giant Horille:

Astolphe had already read in his book, which treats of the ways to foil enchantments, that he would not be able to overcome Horille and deprive him of life, unless he succeeded in snatching from his head a fatal hair. If he succeeded in snatching it, or even breaking it, the giant would immediately, in spite of his enchantments, be deprived of life. That was what the book declared, but it gave no clue to the way in which this hair could be distinguished in the giant’s shaggy mane. (The business proved almost as difficult as Shibli Bagarag’s.) Astolphe had no means of distinguishing the “Identical” from all the others in that mass of hairs, and he had no razor, but, getting possession of the head, he held it by the nose and with his sword he shaved it bare.

XV, 79 to 87.

Among primitive people many dangers are associated with the cutting of the hair. The chief of Namosi in Fiji, before submitting himself to the attentions of his barber, always ate a man by way of precaution,<sup>2</sup> which proves that there was some basis for the apprehension. The first possessor of a magic hair was Nisus, king of Megara, who had a purple hair on the crown of his head. An oracle had foretold that Nisus’s life, his dominion in Megara, and the

<sup>1</sup> *The Shaving of Shagpat.*

<sup>2</sup> *The Golden Bough*, by Sir J. G. Frazer

fate of the city, depended on preservation of the magic hair. But when Minos, king of Crete, came against Megara and besieged the city, Scylla, the daughter of Nisus, fell in love with him. While her father was sleeping she cut off the purple hair and thus betrayed both her father and her country; she received the just punishment of her treachery, for Minos, instead of fulfilling his promise to marry her, tied her to the poop of his ship and dragged her through the water until she was drowned.

And Hippogriff! Well might the Cardinal d'Este wonder where the devil Ariosto went to find this flying horse! It is no creature of classical antiquity, but makes its first shadowy appearance in Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*—so shadowy in comparison with its performances on Ariosto's stage, that the latter may with justice claim it as his own peculiar property. He wants you to know that the Hippogriff is no imaginary creature, but the real offspring of a griffin and a mare; deriving its feathers, wings, front feet, head and claws from the father, and its rear members from the mother's side. These very rare animals come from the Ryphaean mountains beyond the glacial seas; which mountains were somewhere in Central or Northern Europe. Here is, perhaps, a far-off link with Herodotus, who tells of the gold mines of Northern Europe, which are guarded by the griffins against the one-eyed Arimaspi who try to rob them.

Many wonders are told in the pages of the *Orlando*, for the heroes travel to far countries of the world where strange things happen, and Ariosto cares nothing for people who stay at home and doubt the truth of what he relates. He has no patience with such vulgar minds, for he is convinced that readers of intelligence will believe him.

ORLANDO FURIOSO

All they that to far countries do resort,  
Shall see strange sights, in earth, in seas, in skies,  
Which when againe at home they shall report,  
Their solemne tales, esteemed are as lyes,  
For why the fond and simple common sort,  
Beleeve but what they feele or see with eyes,  
Therefore to them, my tail may seeme a fable,  
Whose wits to understand it are not able.

VII, 1 (Harington's translation).

In the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne there are three girdle clasps on which are carved hippocriffs drinking at the fountain. They come from Burgundian tombs of the early seventh century, and are described as a survival of an ancient Eastern *motif*. At any rate, their existence in Western Europe points to the possibility that the hippocriff may have figured in some of the stories from which Boiardo and Ariosto drew their material.

Ariosto's Hippogriff is a type of Love; an erratic and preposterous creature, who will lead you in the paths of error and destruction, unless you are taught by Logistille, the spirit of reason and contentment, to train and direct your steed. Roger (whose love for Bradamante is so inconstant), shows his incapacity to govern this courser. As soon as he is mounted he is carried away from his loved one to the far ends of the earth, and is ensnared by the enchantress Alcine, in spite of the warnings which he has received from Astolphe, who has himself been one of her victims.

In modern literature allusions to the Hippogriff are rare. German writers confuse it with Pegasus: Wieland, for example, in the opening line of *Oberon*, says:

Once more, now saddle me the Hippogriff, ye Muses;  
To ride into the country of Romance.

GEORGE MEREDITH

But the creature is, in truth, a play-fellow of the Comic Spirit, joining in the merry game of hunting the Egoist. We must believe Ariosto's emphatic assurance of its real existence, and the fact is significant that Meredith is the only modern writer who has recognised the true nature of this rare hybrid.

In *Sandra Belloni* Meredith mounts the sentimental lover, Wilfrid Pole, on this creature of Ariosto's fancy. Wilfrid's state is not delirium or frenzy or even madness; it is that he does not possess Angelica's ring of Common Sense; he therefore leaves the "firm earth" for airy delusions and escape from practical realities. He is the sort of person who "could pledge himself to eternity, but shrank from being bound to eleven o'clock on the morrow morning."

He had sold out of the English service, and was to receive the money in a couple of days. How long would the money support him? It would not pay half his debts! What, then, did this pursuit of Emilia mean? To blink this question, he had to give the spur to Hippogriff. It meant (upon Hippogriff at a brisk gallop), that he intended to live for her, die for her, if need be, and carve out of the world all that she would require.

The Hippogriff has a peculiar trick, for while Wilfrid is burning to rush ahead, the beast capers in one spot, abominably ludicrous . . . when *he* sees that there are obstructions, it is best to jump off his back. And we should abandon him then, save that having once tasted what he can do for us, we become enamoured of the habit of going keenly, and defying obstacles.

Ariosto's scenes, like Meredith's, are full of movement; still life has no attractions. These two poets love every-

## ORLANDO FURIOSO

thing which they may touch and see and put in motion; they have little feeling for the distant view; still less for the life beyond.

Alas! Scientific progress, which has brought the countries of the world so much nearer together, has taken us still farther away from the country of Romance. But the age of chivalry, its ideals and its poetry, will never lose their charm.

Moon-illumined summer night,  
That holds in thrall the fantasy,  
Fair wonder-world of faerie,  
Arise in all thy ancient might!<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mondbeglänzte Zaubernacht,  
Die den Sinn gefangen hält,  
Wundervolle Märchenwelt,  
Steig' auf in der alten Pracht!

Tieck.

These lines have been called the motto of the Romantic School. The English translation is taken from *A History of German Literature*, by Calvin Thomas, LL.D.

### *Chapter XIII*

## MEREDITH'S CONCEPTION OF NATURE

By KARL TESCHE. MARBURG, 1921

FEHR's observation, that Meredith's outlook presents a union of romantic feeling with ideas of evolution, is further studied and developed by Tesche, who observes that nature imagery culminated in the romantic poets, and they give us a valuable standard of comparison for judging similar characteristics in the literature which succeeded that movement.

The idea of evolution found its way into literature, not through Darwin, but through the positivism of the French philosopher Auguste Comte, who recognised in all forms of human existence an evolutionary process, which seeks to raise our nature and bring out from its humbler origins the human type. The key to his system is the Law of the Three States: each of our leading conceptions, each branch of our knowledge, passes successively through three different phases; there are three different ways in which the human mind explains phenomena, each way following the other in order. These three stages are the Theological, the Metaphysical and the Positive, namely, that in which the man with his whole intellect and energy turns to the search for truth and finds satisfaction in the pursuit of practical objects.

The spirit of optimism which followed the introduction

### MEREDITH'S CONCEPTION OF NATURE

of Comte's philosophy into England is reflected in passages like the following, quoted from Herbert Spencer's *Essays on Education*:

Some centuries ago there was uniformity of belief—religious, political and educational. All men were Romanists, all were Monarchs, all were disciples of Aristotle. . . . Of the three phases through which human opinion passes—the unanimity of the ignorant, the disagreement of the inquiring, and the unanimity of the wise—it is manifest that the second is the parent of the third. However impatiently, therefore, we may witness the present conflict of educational systems, we must recognise it as a transition stage needful to be passed through, and beneficent in its ultimate effects.

In our need of a cosmological synthesis we look for a faith which will correspond with scientific developments; which will satisfy both our spiritual intuitions and our understanding. If we bear this fact in mind, we shall see why German idealism, and above all the positivism of Comte, who before Darwin based his philosophy on an intellectual evolution, have had so powerful an influence in literature.

The objective attitude is that of a poet who comes under the influence of nature, which calls up from his spirit a sympathetic response, something like the vibration set up in a musical instrument at rest, when a chord is struck from some other source.

A subjective poet feels himself more or less unconsciously endowing nature with his personality. He dresses nature with his own feeling and outlook, using it as a vessel or sounding board for conveying his thought.

The objective-subjective method of approach, which is

GEORGE MEREDITH

Meredith's, is one in which nature and the poet are blended in a higher unity, for which the characteristic expression is activity; there is an interchange between the two, a mutual response between the ego and nature, which are perceived as being dependent on each other:

That gives Nature to us, this  
Give we her, and so we kiss.<sup>1</sup>

"For my part," said Meredith, "I love and cling to earth, as the one piece of God's handiwork which we possess," and here he is expressing his positivist outlook, which directs the attention to facts, and leaves on one side everything which is outside our cognizance.

Earth, nature, whose spirit breathes in every lump of soil, is the way which leads up to the Holy of Holies:

She being Spirit in her clods,  
Footway to the God of Gods.<sup>2</sup>

When Wordsworth says,

Kind nature keeps a heavenly door;<sup>3</sup>

he is giving expression to the same thought. For both Wordsworth and Meredith the loving observation of nature in everyday life is capable of releasing thoughts of such force as to open up to our perceptions the infinite breadth of Divine Power. There is, however, a difference between the conceptions of the two poets, for while Wordsworth and the romantic poets generally see in the communion with nature the possibility of bringing near to our imagination a perception of God's greatness, Meredith's idea of God is

<sup>1</sup> *Nature and Life.*    <sup>2</sup> *The Woods of Westermain.*

<sup>3</sup> *Devotional Incitements.*

### MEREDITH'S CONCEPTION OF NATURE

not to be understood in the biblical sense. By God he means something like a universal law, which we can only grasp in so far as we have the gift to observe the little things around us.

A thought which often recurs in Meredith's poems, sometimes dimly perceived amid a wealth of impressions, and sometimes clearly expressed, is that when we look at nature with an understanding mind, she lifts the veil of her secret workings. And this relationship gives to the man who has penetrated into the recesses of nature, a surety which expresses itself wonderfully in guidance and direction of his life; while those by whom nature is "brainlessly unrecognised," are always hesitating and astray.

Once beheld she gives the key  
Airing every doorway.<sup>1</sup>

The subjective-objective outlook of the poet signifies that nature works upon us; dispensing comfort, lifting up our hearts and refreshing us. It is in this spirit that an important action in Meredith's stories is generally introduced with some beautiful picture of nature as though born of it. In the golden meadows, where the Sun comes down to earth and the plumes of the woodland are alight, Richard makes love to Lucy; the Rhineland storm brings him back to consciousness of his duty to the wife and child so long neglected.

Meredith's nature pictures have almost invariably movement as the centre of the theme:

You have seen the huntress moon  
Radiantly facing dawn,  
Dusky meads between them strewn  
Glimmering like downy awn;

<sup>1</sup> *The Woods of Westermain.*

GEORGE MEREDITH

Argent Westward glows the hunt,  
East the blush about to climb;  
One another fair they front,  
Transient, yet outshine the time.<sup>1</sup>

The abiding sensation of the picture, one might say, is its transience, a fluidity is suggested which enlivens it and gives it beauty. It is true that movement is an important feature in the nature descriptions of the romantic poets; but it is not the main effect, which is the landscape as a whole. The contrary is the case with Meredith's nature pictures:

Here the snake across your path  
Stretches in his golden bath:  
Mossy-footed squirrels leap  
Soft as winnowing plumes of Sleep:  
Yaffles on a chuckle skim  
Low to laugh from branches dim:  
Up the pine, where sits the star,  
Rattles deep the moth-winged jar.<sup>1</sup>

Here are the very simplest everyday happenings; the presentation is homely and true to life, but it is just for that reason that this idyll of the woods produces such a charming effect.

Or, where old-eyed oxen chew  
Speculation with the cud,  
Read their pool of vision through,  
Back to hours when mind was mud.<sup>1</sup>

The ox seems to be presented physically to our vision as we watch the peculiar ruminative motion of his chops and look into the mirror of his tired eyes. This is obviously

<sup>1</sup> *The Woods of Westermain.*

### MEREDITH'S CONCEPTION OF NATURE

no mere reminiscence, it is clearly seen and felt to be alive in every nerve of the poet. This exact observation and truthful delineation are qualities which appear in all his poems, whenever they are concerned with things seen in the fields and woods.

The romantic poets have expressed little sympathy with nature in her boisterous moods; Shelley's picture of a storm is masterly, but it is far inferior in power to Meredith's presentation, as, for instance, in his *Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn*, which reminds us indeed of Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, but Meredith has a greater talent for expressing the violence of the storm, as of a spirit tearing the elements as it sweeps through space. The triumph of activity, as the spirit seizes one member after the other—first the South-West wind, then the forest, the ships on the water, and finally the sea itself—is for Meredith nothing but the most glorious music, the harmony of the spheres, it is the clearest expression of life's power, the laughter of the imperishable earth. Spirit is at one with the elements, and the poet humbly addresses his prayer to Earth, the Mother:

Great Mother Nature! teach me, like thee,  
To kiss the season and shun regrets.  
And am I more than the mother who bore,  
Mock me not with thy harmony!<sup>1</sup>

For Meredith a storm has no terrors; when on a Spring morning a raging wind whips the earth with rain and hailstones, it is a picture of life, which through storms like this, breaks its way ever onwards and upwards. In "Hard Weather" it is a rending East Wind, which with teeth and

<sup>1</sup> *Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn.*

GEORGE MEREDITH

claws is tearing the fresh banner of early Spring; the howling of wolves is heard, and the earth quivers under the hoofs of the galloping storm; it is as if a sickle, a scourge, is sweeping over it; the clouds are troops of flesh-and-blood viragoes.

Bursts from a rending East in flaws  
The young green leaflet's harrier, sworn  
To strew the garden, strip the shaws,  
And show our Spring with banner torn.  
Was ever such virago morn?  
The wind has teeth, the wind has claws.  
All the wind's wolves through woods are loose,  
The wild wind's falconry aloft.  
Shrill underfoot the grassblade shrews,  
At gallop, clumped, and down the croft  
Bestrad by shadows, beaten, tossed;  
It seems a scythe, it seems a rod.  
The howl is up at the howl's accost;  
The shivers greet and the shivers nod.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Hard Weather*

## *Chapter XIV*

### GOETHE'S INFLUENCE ON GEORGE MEREDITH

By MARIA KRUSEMEYER

(ENGLISCHE STUDIEN, VOL. LIX; EDITED BY JOHANNES HOOPS; LEIPZIG, 1925)

THE author of this paper has collected all the principal references to Goethe which are to be found in Meredith's novels and in his letters. In the latter Meredith frequently speaks in terms of the warmest admiration for Goethe; as, for instance, in his letter to John Morley (April 5, 1877), where he praises Goethe's fine poem *Das Göttliche*, which has in it, indeed, the same thoughts about men and nature which we recognise in many of Meredith's poems.

It must suffice here briefly to enumerate some of the correspondences to which Dr. Krusemeyer draws attention. She compares Goethe's aphorism, "das eigentliche Studium des Menschen ist der Mensch," with Meredith's in *Beauchamp's Career*, "men and the ideas of men . . . these are my theme." The saying that the proper study of mankind is man, is, of course, older even than Pope.

In *Richard Feverel* are to be found similarities with *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, as, for instance, in the zeal of the respective heroes to help and reform women who have been deceived and "shamefully treated." Also in

GEORGE MEREDITH

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GEORGE MEREDITH

the rousing effect upon them when each learns that he is the father of a child.

“Hail to thee, young man!” exclaims Goethe, “thy learning days are over; Nature has set thee free.” And Meredith:

“Hence, fantastic vapours! What are ye to this! Where are the dreams of the hero when he learns that he has a child? Nature is taking him to her bosom. She will speak presently.”

There is a close identity in the theme of Meredith's story, *The Gentleman of Fifty and the Damsel of Nineteen*, and Goethe's *The Man of Fifty*, which is a short tale inserted in the *Wanderjahre*. An elderly man falls in love with a girl, who is, however, intended by the family to become the wife of her young cousin. But she does not care for her younger suitor and returns the affection of her elderly admirer. Goethe leads his story to a happy conclusion by finding an older mate for the man of fifty and bringing the two young lovers together. How Meredith intended to resolve the situation we do not know, for he never finished the story. In a poem entitled ‘The Last Contention,’ written presumably some time earlier, Meredith discusses the love of an old man for a young girl and warns against a marriage. The old man may worship, but only the young may embrace her.

Soar on thy manhood clear from those  
Whose toothless Winter claws at May,  
And take her as the vein of rose  
Athwart an evening grey.

We are to notice a difference in the way Meredith emphasises the comic element which is absent from Goethe's

### GOETHE'S INFLUENCE

story. Goethe is in style more epic and Meredith more dramatic.

Mignon, of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, corresponds with Kiomi in *Harry Richmond*; but Meredith loves passionate, independent women, so he represents Kiomi as the embodiment of unrestrained natural forces and wild freedom, in contrast to the self-denying, useful Mignon.

The *Pädagogische Provinz* of the *Wanderjahre* has close similarities with Matey Weyburn's school in Switzerland, not only in the likeness of the situation, but in the system of education provided; but Meredith lays more stress than Goethe on games and sports, long country walks and mountain climbing, which he regards as a cure for all the ills of normal children. Co-education of boys and girls is no part of Goethe's scheme, but Matey Weyburn says:

There's the task; it's to separate them as little as possible. All the—*passez-moi le mot*—devilry between the sexes begins at their separation. They're foreigners when they meet; and their alliances are not always binding. The chief object in life, if happiness be the aim, and the growing better than we are, is to teach men and women how to be one; for, if they're not, then each is a morsel for the other to prey on.

But although Weyburn advocates it before he starts the school, we hear nothing more about co-education after the school is founded.

Wilhelm Meister discusses Hamlet's character in much the same way as Alvan does in the *Tragic Comedians*, but here again Meredith goes deeper and adds a comic touch in Alvan's reference to "an Ophelia of fifty."

GEORGE MEREDITH

Comparing Meredith's *Dirge in Woods*<sup>1</sup> with Goethe's *Ueber allen Gipfeln*, Dr. Krusermeyer says:

doubtless Meredith's poem is more artistic than Goethe's which was written down as an expression of his feelings on the Kickelhahn in Ilmenau. Meredith remodels the simple poem just according to his own ideas; deepens the reflection, improving the art and the technique.

Meredith's view of nature is like Goethe's, a feeling of the oneness with all life and movement in the world and in the heavens. He examines and describes nature, but does not sing its praises like the Lake poets, nor does he, like the misanthropic Rousseau, preach the flight from civilisation and a return to the wilderness.

"Be active," says Goethe in his *Lehrjahre*; "activity is the first purpose of mankind." This gospel of doing, which Goethe in every form and variety of expression is constantly teaching, Carlyle also proclaims and through him and with him George Meredith. In all his letters and books he is contending against dreamy idleness and sentimentality. Along with his Comic Spirit Meredith makes this the foundation of his philosophy:

Life is but the pebble sunk;  
Deeds, the circle growing!<sup>2</sup>

Action, he says, means life to the soul as to the body. . . . Action energizes man's brains, generates grander capacities, provokes greatness of soul between enemies, and is the guarantee of positive conquest for the benefit of our species.

(*Tragic Comedians*, Chap. iii.)

<sup>1</sup> See page 186.

<sup>2</sup> *The Head of Bran the Blest*.

## GOETHE'S INFLUENCE

For

Our questions are a mortal brood,  
Our work is everlasting.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Krusemeyer concludes by quoting a fine passage from Goethe's talks with Eckermann.

We are essentially collective beings, whatever pose we like to assume. For how little we have and are which can really be called our own! We must receive everything and learn everything, not only from those who went before us, but from those, too, who are with us now. Even the greatest genius would not go very far if he tried to be dependent only on his own mind and being. In fact, what good is there in us at all, if it is not the power and disposition to draw towards us supplies from the outside world and make them serviceable to our higher purposes? I can perhaps speak for myself and say with due modesty what I feel. It is true that in my long life I have done and brought into being some things of which I could with justice be proud. But if we wish to be honest, what had I which was really my own, except the capacity and disposition to see and hear, to pick and choose, and to reproduce what has been heard or has happened and with a little talent to breathe into it something of my spirit? In no sense do I owe my works to my own wisdom alone, but to thousands of things and persons outside myself, who have presented me with the needful material. And it is at bottom mere foolishness to ask whether a thing comes out of one's self or from others; or whether one's work is part of himself or of others. The point is that one should possess a strong will, with the knack and perseverance to win through.

<sup>1</sup> *The Question Whither.*

## Chapter XV

### SOME THOUGHTS SUGGESTED BY DR. KRUSEMEYER'S ESSAY

“CONFFOUND the Press,” said Meredith, “for its impudence in calling me the pupil of anybody!” He was well acquainted with German literature, and especially with the works of J. P. Richter, Goethe and Heine, and he based *The Tragic Comedians* on Helene v. Racowitzza’s book, *Meine Beziehungen zu Ferdinand Lasalle*, but it is not so easy to prove that he was more indebted to German writers than to others who came under his notice in the wide range of his reading. Great minds think alike, and we may often notice how closely they approach each other when their feelings prompt them

To speak the memorable, the true,  
The luminous as a moon uncloaked:  
For proof that there, among earth’s dumb,  
A soul had passed and said our best.<sup>1</sup>

Compare, for example, Tennyson’s evil dreams of Nature—

So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life,<sup>2</sup>

with Meredith’s

As only for the numbers Nature’s care  
Is shown, and she the personal nothing heeds.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Night Walk*

<sup>2</sup> *In Memoriam*

<sup>3</sup> *The Test of Manhood*.

THOUGHTS ON DR. KRUSEMEYER'S ESSAY

(Where skips the young gazelle the elephant comes tumbling after).

We might compare, again, Richard Feverel at the crisis of his life, thrilled with the thought that he was a father, and looking within the wayside shrine, where he saw the Virgin holding her Child—with Faust's Margaret at the shrine of the Mater Dolorosa. Goethe's attitude to the Christian religion was similar to Meredith's, but in the closing scene of Faust, Part 2, there is a "melodramatic supernaturalism" which is insincere. "It is the charm of sentimentalism," said Goethe, "with which no art can dispense, and which in subjects of this kind reigns in all its fulness. . . . Writing for the stage is a trade that one must understand, and requires a talent that one must possess." And to Eckermann in June, 1831, he said:

You will confess that the conclusion, where the redeemed soul is carried up, was very difficult to manage, and that I, amid such supersensual matters, about which we scarcely have even an intimation, might easily have lost myself in the vague, if I had not, by means of sharply-drawn images and conceptions borrowed from the Christian Church, given my poetical design an acceptable frame and definiteness.

They are all looking for the truth, these poets and sages. Goethe sometimes finds it in the heart; which will show us plainly what we are to seize and what to shun:

Ach dass wir doch dem reinen stillen Wink  
Des Herzens nachzugehn so sehr verlernen!  
Ganz leise spricht ein Gott in unserer Brust,  
Ganz leise, ganz vernehmlich zeigt uns an,  
Was zu ergreifen ist und was zu fliehn.

Tasso: III, 2.

GEORGE MEREDITH

Alas, that we're so prone to disregard  
The still and holy warnings of the heart!  
A God doth whisper softly in our breast,  
Softly yet audibly, doth counsel us,  
Both what we ought to seek and what to shun.

Tr. by Anna Swanwick.

But Meredith mistrusts the uncorrected heart; it is shifty;  
a fruitless breeder; a force blind-eyed; by turns a lump  
swung on a time-piece, and by turns a quivering energy to  
jump for seats angelical.

O sir, the truth, the truth! is't in the skies,  
Or in the grass, or in this heart of ours?  
But O the truth, the truth! the many eyes  
That look on it! the diverse things they see,  
According to their thirst for fruit or flowers!<sup>1</sup>

or for a drink, like Tennyson's Friar Tuck!

Boldness out of the bottle! I defy thee.  
Boldness is in the blood, Truth in the bottle,  
She lay so long at the bottom of her well  
In the cold water that she lost her voice,  
And so she glided up into the heart  
O' the bottle, the warm wine, and found it again.  
*In vino veritas.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt

<sup>2</sup> The Foresters

## *Chapter XVI*

### GEORGE MEREDITH AND EDUCATION

A SKETCH OF THE CENTRAL PROBLEM IN HIS WORK AND LIFE

By REINHARD BECKER. MARBURG, 1928.

WATCHING the restless foliage of a wind-whipped copse or the breakers on a stormy coast, we may find a bond of kinship between these elemental moods of nature and the genius of Meredith. Is there not something in Meredith's style which reminds one of the pulse of the sea, the lull and then the breaking of the wave? Now the story hangs back idly, the sentences are long and meditative, but then suddenly there comes a forward thrust, leading in with leaps and bounds a scene of unexampled power, all life, flashing, irreflective and completely devoid of form or rule. Exactly similar is the beating of the waves against a cliff, or the bending and blowing of trees by the wind. Now it is only a light rustle, then comes a sudden tumult, and then again a rustle. But the intervals and the strength of the successive impulses are never alike; the theme, however, is always the perpetual alternation of calm with swiftest motion:

The wind-whipped, anywhither wave  
Crazily tumbled on a shingle-grave  
To waste in foam.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Earth and Man.*

## GEORGE MEREDITH

In "Love in the Valley" there is a typical Meredithian landscape, a picture of quick movement, with kaleidoscopic transformation from the gay sunrise to dull unfriendly weather; from galloping breezes to the final scene of calm and splendour:

Sunrays, leaning on our southern hills and lighting  
Wild cloud-mountains that drag the hills along,  
Oft ends the day of your shifting brilliant laughter  
Chill as a dull face frowning on a song.  
Ay, but shows the South-West a ripple-feathered bosom  
Blown to silver while the clouds are shaken and ascend  
Scaling the mid-heavens as they stream, there comes a  
sunset  
Rich, deep like love in beauty without end.

Dr. Becker confirms his view with the happy discovery of this passage:

People talk of perfect beauty; suitable for paintings and statues. Living faces, if they're to show the soul, which is the star on the peak of beauty, must lend themselves to commotion. Nature does it in a breezy tree or over ruffled waters. (*The Amazing Marriage*).

Meredith himself, so dynamical and so closely in union with nature, lived in harmony with those all-pervading moods of earth, the chasing clouds and storms, the flitting shadows, flowing waters and bubbling springs, the rustling woods and bending pine trees, the tumbling butterflies and buzzing insects. All these things were an intimate part of his work and life.

He could not bring himself to regard his books, any more than his women, as *market wares*. "Distinct, peculiar, and

## GEORGE MEREDITH AND EDUCATION

lonely," said Justin McCarthy, "is his place in fiction, owing to a certain perverse indifference on the part of the artist to the business of making his meaning as clear to others as it is to himself." So far from wishing to propitiate his readers he said: "In the way of art I never stop to consider what is admissible to the narrow minds of the drawing-room." How like Beethoven's protest! "Do you suppose that I am thinking of your larynx when the spirit comes over me?"

### EDUCATION THROUGH FACTS

Alongside a planned, conscious, more or less scientific education, Meredith conceives another educative effect, which life, the community, and our individuality produce upon us at all times, and that in a way quite independent of the will. Whenever we find ourselves in touch with men or things, educational influences come into play, which in their nature are incalculable, unforeseen and therefore quite irrational. We are subject perpetually to this way of being educated, and it is incomparably more important, deeper and more lasting in its after effects than every kind of planned education however perfect, whether in school or in the home.

Meredith regards not only the whole life of the individual, but also the history of mankind, under this aspect of involuntary education. His philosophy, by which we are always to understand the outlook which determines our conduct, is governed by this thought, as its main support, which gives to the life of the individual, as well as of the community, a sense of ceaseless forward and upward development to ever higher moral standards.

In Meredith's novels education is the prevailing theme.

GEORGE MEREDITH

In one way and another we see how his heroes and heroines are educated through *nature, round big facts, flesh and blood reality* and *circumstances*.

The question asked by nature is, 'has he heart to take and keep an impression?' For, if he has, circumstances will force him on and carve the figure of a brave man out of that mass of contradictions.

(*Sandra Belloni*).

Between the educative *facts* (the word Earth is often used by Meredith to denote them), and everything dreamy, hypocritical, untrue or Utopian, a perpetual war is waged, which always ends in the defeat of the illusion. Meredith is the declared enemy of everything unreal, and the interest of his novels lies in the clash of facts with fictions.

RHODA FLEMING

The whole Fleming family is more or less involved in a fallacious outlook on life, and this is especially true of Dahlia and Rhoda, who seem blissfully forgetful of their situation as daughters of an unsuccessful Kentish farmer. They have absurd illusions about the fashionable world:

They remembered and crooned over, till by degrees they adopted the phrases and manner of speech of highly grammatical people in the storybooks, especially of the French fairy books, where the princes talk in periods as sweetly rounded as are their silken calves; nothing less than angelic, so as to be a model to ordinary men.

The further development of the story is just one long,

## GEORGE MEREDITH AND EDUCATION

pathetic awakening to facts, a hard, but thorough education leading to recognition of the laws of life and submission to reality.

Dahlia's love for Edward Blancove suffers a cruel disillusionment; her education reaches the decisive point when she has to confess to her uncle Anthony Hackbutt that her life has been frivolous and useless:

But I never helped him (father) there, said Dahlia. In the moment when she clearly and unshrinkingly accepts the truth she has become ripe.

She had chosen to stand up and take the scourge of God—after which the stones cast by men are not painful.

By this I mean that she had voluntarily stript her spirit bare of evasion, and seen herself for what she was; pleading no excuse. His scourge is the Truth, and she had faced it.

Rhoda, too, comes to knowledge of herself and acceptance of her position in her own class.

Enough of accurate reflection was given to the girl to perceive that discontent with her station was the original cause of her discontent now. What she had sown she was reaping:—and wretchedly colourless are the harvests of our dream! The sun has not shone on them. They may have a tragic blood-hue, as with Dahlia's; but they will never have any warm, and fresh, and nourishing sweetness—the juice which is in a single blade of grass.

Edward Blancove, the deceiver, clever, rich and cynical, deluded with the thought of his own importance and invulnerability, is at last completely changed through

GEORGE MEREDITH

Dahlia's unshaken constancy, through her faith in him and finally through the spiritual transformation which he sees in her.

He came to the strange conclusion that beyond our calling a woman a Saint for rhetorical purposes, and esteeming her as one for pictorial, it is indeed possible, as he had slightly discerned in this woman's presence, both to think her saintly and to have the sentiments inspired by the over-earthly in her person. Her voice, her simple words, her gentle resolve, all issuing of a capacity to suffer evil, and pardon it, conveyed that character to a mind not soft for receiving such impressions.

Dr. Becker surveys the whole field of Meredith's novels, interpreting the author's views with the help of many quotations: his affection for young people; his preference for co-education of boys and girls; his conviction that women should be taught a profession and trained to take their place as equals in all respects with men. What Meredith sought to bring about in these connections has to a large extent been accomplished. "I shall see," said he in 1861, "the world coming round to my opinion, and thinking it its own."

How great was the need of reform in those days, especially in the education of girls, we may learn from Spencer's *Essays on Education*. Spencer examined the merciless school curriculum then frequently enforced and wonders, not so much that it does extreme injury, as that it can be borne at all. He quotes the facts given by Sir John Forbes from personal knowledge of what he asserts after much enquiry to be an average sample of the middle-class girls' school system throughout England.

GEORGE MEREDITH AND EDUCATION

The following is a summary of the time-table:

In bed	- - - - -	9	(the younger 10)
In school, at their studies and tasks		9	
In school, or in the house, the elder at optional studies or work, the younger at play	- - - - -	3½	(the younger 2½)
At meals	- - - - -	1½	
Exercise in the open-air, in the shape of a formal walk, often with lesson-books in hand, and even this only when the weather is fine at the appointed time	- - - - -	1	
			—
		24	hours
			—

And what are the results of this 'astounding regimen,' as Sir John Forbes terms it? Of course feebleness, pallor, want of spirits, general ill-health. But he describes something more. This utter disregard of physical welfare, out of extreme anxiety to cultivate the mind—this prolonged exercise of brain and deficient exercise of limbs—he found to be habitually followed, not only by disordered functions but by malformation. He says: 'We lately visited, in a large town, a boarding-school containing forty girls; and we learnt, on close and accurate inquiry, that there was not one of the girls who had been at the school two years (and the majority had been as long) that was not more or less crooked!'

Dr. Becker thinks that justice has not been done by reviewers, and especially by Continental ones, to the emphasis laid by Meredith on physical training in his

GEORGE MEREDITH

scheme of education. He was himself a type of the sportsman and athlete; Hyndman said of him:

Meredith was a man who took a tremendous lot out of himself, not only intellectually but physically. He was always throwing about clubs, or going through gymnastic exercises or taking long walks at a great pace, not allowing an ounce of fat to accumulate on his body or face.

So we find Matey Weyburn, the head boy in Cuper's school, teaching the boys to be hard against themselves, "to laugh at kicks and learn the art of self-defence—train to rejoice in whipcord muscles." But attack—"driving a straight left like lightning off the shoulder slick on to t'other's nob"—could be even more important than defence, for "the habit of the defensive paralyses will." Boxing is for Meredith "old England's manfullest display," and in the contest of two prize-fighters he sees "the spiritual of the gross ugly picture. . . . Their hands grasped firmly: thereupon becoming fists of a hostile couple in position. And simply to learn which of us two is the better man! Or in other words, with four simple fists to compass a patent fact and stand it on the historic pedestal, with a little red writing underneath . . . this kind of contention . . . is good-humoured from beginning to end; trial of skill, trial of stamina; Nature and Art; Old English; which made us what we are; and no rancours, no vows of vengeance; the beaten man of the two bowing to the bit of history he has helped to make."<sup>1</sup>

Boxing is a science, but "the best in the world is fencing, which braces the nerves, tightens muscles, occupies brain,

<sup>1</sup> *The Amazing Marriage*, Chap. xvi.

better than anything going: contains fit measure of excitement and is thorough exercise." (Letters, 101.)

Exercise is a spiritual medicine; in the crisis of their lives both Richard Feverel and Harry Richmond find it in the mountains:

Carry your fever to the Alps, you of minds diseased, not to sit down in sight of them ruminating, for bodily ease and comfort will trick the soul and set you measuring our lean humanity against yonder sublime and infinite; but mount, rack the limbs, wrestle it out among the peaks; test danger, sweat, earn rest: learn to discover ungrudgingly that haggard fatigue is the fair vision you have to run to earth, and that rest is your uttermost reward.

(*Harry Richmond.*)

Space will not permit of dealing at greater length with Dr. Becker's interesting paper. There is, however, still one more important point to be noticed. René Galland has said of Meredith, "Il est encore de son temps par un autre trait bien caractéristique: le respect de la science." Most readers and reviewers of Meredith have shared this opinion, which, says Becker, finds no confirmation either in his works, his letters or the facts of his life. His attitude to the scientific movement of his generation seems always to have been one of critical detachment. The realities which play a decisive rôle are not for him observed facts of outward, material life, but rather those things which no scientific method can discover, but which we learn by the exercise of common sense. So far from being "de son temps" Meredith was to an extraordinary degree ahead of it. Instead of making approaches to the spirit of modern science, with its appeal on the one hand to "facts," and on the other hand with its soul-destroying influences on

GEORGE MEREDITH

life, he showed himself much more closely in union with cosmic powers, which may be recognised though not defined, in the Spirit of Earth, whose loving and reverent disciple he was. In the next chapter on "Meredith and Modern Science" some evidence has been collected in support of Becker's contention.

## Chapter XVII

### MEREDITH AND MODERN SCIENCE<sup>1</sup>

AMONG the characters in Meredith's novels are two eminent scientists, Sir Austin Leverel, the Systemmaker, and Sir Willoughby Patterne, the Egoist. Sir Willoughby would not be outdone in popular accomplishments; he therefore worked at science, and had a laboratory. In the prelude to *The Egoist* we read:

The realistic method of a conscientious transcription of all the visible, and a repetition of all the audible, is mainly accountable for our present branfulness, and for that prolongation of the vasty and the noisy, out of which as from an undrained fen, steams the malady of sameness, our modern malady. . . . We drove in a body to Science the other day for an antidote; which was as if tired pedestrians should mount the engine-box of headlong trains; and Science introduced us to our o'er-hoary ancestry—them in the Oriental posture: whereupon we set up a primæval chattering to rival the Amazon forest nigh nightfall, cured, we fancied. And before daybreak our disease was hanging on to us again, with the extension of a tail. . . . We were the same, and animals into the bargain. That is all we got from Science. . . . But wise men are strong in their opinion that we should encourage the Comic Spirit. . . . 'The remedy,' say they, 'of your frightful affliction is here, through the stillatory of Comedy, and not in Science, nor yet in Speed, whose name is but another for voracity.'

<sup>1</sup> See page 144.

GEORGE MEREDITH

As for Sir Austin Feverel, Lady Blandish's last feelings of love and respect for the Scientific Humanist perished with the death of Lucy. When the "Ordeal" was over she wrote to Austin Wentworth:

I can only say that there are some who are worse than people who deliberately commit crimes. No doubt Science will benefit by it. They kill little animals for the sake of Science. . . . Oh! how sick I am of theories, and Systems, and the pretensions of men! I shall hate the name of Science till the day I die.

Notice again that Diana Warwick and Lady Emma Dunstane are models of intelligence, ensamples to the flock; their studies included Latin and Greek; they

were readers of books of all sorts, political, philosophical, economical, romantic; and they mixed the diverse readings in thought. (D.C., Chap. iv.)

Their outlook, in fact, embraced everything *except Science*.

A great deal has been said about Meredith as the poet of evolution, as J. B. Priestley calls him, but his evolution has little to do with Darwinism and nineteenth-century science; it is the conception derived from Comte of human history as a gradual upward progress. It is true that evolution, or the survival of the fittest, was accepted by Meredith, coming as the law of progress in the course of nature, like thwackings to Shibli Bagarag:

Earth yields the milk, but all her mind  
Is vowed to thresh for stouter stock;<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Hard Weather*. The view held by Meredith and others, that the development of the human conscience will lift mankind above the struggle for existence in its cruder forms, is remarked upon by Grimschi (see page 295).

but science lay outside his field; "he had no need for that hypothesis." When he said to Clodd in 1902, "I back your Huxley throughout," the stress is on "your." He is not with Disraeli on the side of the angels, nor with Carlyle in describing Darwinism as "devilish nonsense"; he traces man's origin back to the caves and that is near enough to earth for his philosophy. Sir Austin Feverel made a "sour mouth comically compressed" when he speculated on his legal adviser, and that seems to be Meredith's attitude whenever he speaks of science. In those days the great achievements of science had caused many of its champions to presume too much; and it may be supposed that some remark of its chosen prophet aroused a spirit of opposition in the champion of common sense. Herbert Spencer, in his *Essays on Education*, wrote:

Thus to the question we set out with—what knowledge is of most worth—the uniform reply is—Science. This is the verdict on all the counts. For direct self-preservation, or the maintenance of life and health, the all-important knowledge is—Science. For that indirect self-preservation which we call gaining a livelihood the knowledge of greatest value is—Science. For the due discharge of parental functions, the proper guidance is to be found only in—Science. For that interpretation of national life, past and present, without which the citizen cannot rightly regulate his conduct, the indispensable key is—Science. Alike for the most perfect production and highest enjoyment of art in all its forms, the needful preparation is still—Science. And for purposes of discipline—intellectual, moral, religious—the most efficient study is, once more—Science. The question which at first seemed so perplexed, has become, in the course of our inquiry, comparatively simple.

GEORGE MEREDITH

When news came from America of the first sea-fight with an ironclad ship, Meredith wrote to Captain Maxse:

Of course, you have heard all about the *Monitor* and *Merrimac*. A pretty business sea-fighting comes to! Was there ever so devilish an entertainment! Blood bursting from the eyes and ears of the men at the guns, who seemed to be under the obligation of knocking their own senses to atoms as a preliminary to sending the souls of their foes to perdition. . . . Science, I presume, will at last put it to our option whether we will improve one another from off the face of the globe, and we must decide by our common sense.

In *Foresight and Patience* the latter says to her sister,

When you it shall discern  
Bright as you are, to me the Age will turn.

and Foresight replies:

For neither of us has it any care;  
Its learning is through Science to despair.

Here Meredith warns us against the pessimistic thought of his generation, derived from the conception of Nature as a "cold, unintelligent association of cause and effect; the rather brutal owner of a cockpit."

Are then Love and Light Its aim—  
Good Its glory, Bad Its blame?

Nay; to alter evermore  
Things from what they were before,

wrote Thomas Hardy in *The Dynasts*. Optimists and Pessimists are both prophets of Evolution, but these in a historical, and those in a more scientific sense.

G. M. Trevelyan in 1913 launched, as he said, a "delicate investigation" into the character of history, and he took up the subject again in 1927. The last fifty years, he said, have witnessed great changes in the management of Clio's temple.<sup>1</sup>

Changes have indeed taken place, and they are of a nature much more radical than anything suggested in Professor Trevelyan's essays. Historians still go on in the old way:

Some talk of Alexander and some of Hercules,  
Of Hector and Lysander and such great men as these;

and meanwhile Clio has been kidnapped. In 1859, the year when *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* and Darwin's *Origin of Species* were published, Karl Marx gave to the world his philosophy of history, destined, said Engels, to do for history what Darwin's theory has done for biology. It is the "fundamental proposition which forms the nucleus of the Communist Manifesto," and begins by stating "that in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organisation necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch."<sup>2</sup>

We cannot dismiss "the materialist conception of history" merely on the ground that Communism is not respectable but, as Engels himself said, quite the opposite. Karl Marx took Clio from what he called "the misty cloud formation of heaven," and put her in "the gross material production of earth."

<sup>1</sup> *Clio, a Muse and other Essays*, by George Macaulay Trevelyan : Longmans, Green & Co., 1930.

<sup>2</sup> Preface by Frederick Engels to *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* : Martin Lawrence, Limited, London, 1888.

GEORGE MEREDITH

We must, however, go back more than fifty, more than a hundred years, to find the germ of these new ideas. In 1818, when Schopenhauer offered his book to Brockhaus, he wrote: "My work is a new philosophical system; something which no man's brain has yet conceived. It is one of those which later will become the source and inspiration of hundreds of other books."

With the kind permission of the Publishers I am able to quote some remarks by Paul Fechter from an essay entitled "Schopenhauer and his Century," which appeared in the *Deutsche Rundschau* for February, 1938.<sup>1</sup>

It is very singular how the young Schopenhauer anticipates the change which was to come about towards the end of the nineteenth century in the attitude to history and nature. For Hegel, History was everything: a ray of light from the Throne of God, illuminating the path which leads up through the ages to the Prussian Monarchy. For Schopenhauer, the first Realist, history is of no account; it is an ever recurring children's scuffle for nuts and football results; a lot of shouting about nothing, in which only fools can see development. Young as he was, Schopenhauer had already looked into the workshops of history. On his big European tour with his parents he had seen the convicts and prisoners of war in the Toulon arsenals, making munitions for Napoleon. The misery and the frightful poverty, of which he was a witness there, destroyed in him all feeling for the romance of history. From that day he hated Napoleon, and not only Napoleon: world history became in his eyes a new snare and delusion; the youth with his international training looked away from history scornfully and somewhat blasé. . . . At the same time he led the

<sup>1</sup> The Publishers of the *Deutsche Rundschau* are Philipp Reclam Jun., Leipzig, Inselstrasse, 22/24.

movement from eighteenth-century ideas about nature to present-day conceptions of the relations of living creatures to each other. While his ideas about history paved the way to an "anti-hero" outlook like that of Bernard Shaw (who in general owes much to Schopenhauer), his perceptions of the organic world laid the foundation for modern views about the life of animals and plants. He destroyed the basis of sentimental ideas about nature, which had satisfied the eighteenth century, and applied his individualist theory also to the animal world. He saw there, too, the struggle for existence, the war of extermination—the Will which perpetually devoured itself and created new sufferings. Modern biology and new theories of the origin of species have to thank him for their first principles, though indeed the details have in course of time been revealed as even harsher and more merciless.

Meredith has another sly thrust at science and despair in the poem on Empedocles, the great Sicilian poet, scientist and precursor of the modern evolutionists; who threw himself into the crater of Aetna, in the hope that men, finding no traces of his end, would suppose him translated to heaven. But his hopes were cheated by the volcano, which cast forth his brazen sandals and betrayed his secret.

He leaped. With none to hinder,  
 Of Aetna's fiery scoriae  
 In the next vomit-shower, made he  
 A more peculiar cinder.  
 And this great Doctor, can it be,  
 He left no saner recipe  
 For men at issue with despair?  
 Admiring, even his poet owns,<sup>1</sup>  
 While noting his fine lyric tones,  
 The last of him was heels in air!

<sup>1</sup> An allusion to Matthew Arnold's *Empedocles on Etna*.

## *Chapter XVIII*

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEORGE MEREDITH'S ARTISTIC GENIUS AS REVEALED IN HIS NOVELS

By EDGAR MERTNER. HALLE, 1931

DR. MERTNER's dissertation is based, not only on a close study of Meredith's novels, but also on a wide acquaintance with English, French and German criticism: it is to a large extent a review of reviews. But the prominent theme is the influence on Meredith's art and method of the two years which he spent at the Herrnhuter school at Neuwied, not far from Coblenz. The records which Dr. Mertner has been able to collect of that institution are scanty, but in a programme of the "public exhibition" held on the 10th April, 1843, Meredith's name appears twice, the items for which he was responsible being "The Death of William Tell" by Uhland and a violin performance.

Among distinguished Englishmen who spent a part of their school years at Neuwied was the late Professor Henry Morley, who left behind him grateful testimony of the influence for good which the system of education there exercised on the character of the pupils. Another English pupil wrote, "I was taught at Neuwied to give free play to all my faculties. Every one of us was trained to become

### GEORGE MEREDITH'S ARTISTIC GENIUS

a thinker and a student for himself thereafter." It is the significance of these influences which Dr. Mertner desires to emphasise in his examination of Meredith's work, and he concludes with the following remarks:

Le Gallienne, one of the first and most enthusiastic admirers of Meredith, says somewhere, 'Had Mr. Meredith only been a German, Europe and not England alone, would have welcomed him as the greatest of all living philosophers.' It was perhaps not exactly his intention, but in that remark he touches upon something in Meredith which is typically un-English; namely, the emphatic preaching of a philosophy of life. Meredith is 'too difficult' for the average Englishman, who does not love the strongly pedagogic tone with its flavour of theorising, or the quest for philosophical conceptions of life; both of which correspond much more with the German character. The Englishman's attitude to life is a very simple one: he lets things come along and wriggles out of tight places in the best way he can. He calls it 'muddling through,' and has so far come out of it with fair success. The German professor says to Harry Richmond: 'you wait for the shifting of a tide to carry you on'; the Englishman's idea in practical matters being to rise to the occasion; and in his literature one may find the most delightful examples in which the contrast is brought out between practical methods of attacking a problem and any sort of search for theoretical guidance. It is here that Meredith looks for a middle way; as an Englishman he wishes to adapt his philosophy to practical life; he would no more tie himself to a theory for its own sake than to art for art's sake. But the rule of thumb of the average Englishman is too unintelligent. He puts his indictment of the English outlook into the mouth of a German, Dr. Julius von

GEORGE MEREDITH

Karsteg (*Harry Richmond*); in the same way as (according to H. Meyer), he took from a German writer his Comic Spirit,<sup>1</sup> and later said of the Germans, 'their treble-Dutch lumbersoness of the Comic Spirit is of itself exclusive of the idea of Comedy.' Yet he owes a good part of his philosophy to German inspiration. He recommends what the ordinary Englishman detests, 'a scheme of life consonant with the spirit of modern philosophy—with the views of intelligent, moral, humane human beings of this period' (*Harry Richmond*). He loves the ways of the practical Englishman, who ought, however, not to be content with 'muddling through,' but should reflect more and take a more intellectual grasp of his problems.

What Meredith derived from Neuwied was not really, as Priestley suggests, the negative benefit that it enabled him to escape the ordinary routine of an English school, but the practical advantage of the Herrnhuter system, which was directed to develop initiative, activity and confidence in the scholars; and Meredith learnt at Neuwied to cultivate independence of thought; not only was the poet in him awakened there; he came so much under the influence of the German spirit, that it served as a counterpoise to his English temperament, the two together producing that synthesis which we so much admire in his work and personality.

<sup>1</sup> For some observations on H. Meyer's opinion see page 68.

## *Chapter XIX*

### GEORGE MEREDITH'S EARLY WORKS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR HIS PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

By HEINZ WALZ. BERLIN, 1932

VERY little is known of Meredith's life before his first marriage in 1849 at the age of twenty-one—nothing whatever is recorded of him between his sixteenth and eighteenth years. Walz suggests that the reserve which he maintained about the facts of his youth is referable to the very slow development of his genius and to the fact that the publication of his early poems in 1851, and their reception by the critics, prompted him to recognise (and cover with oblivion if it were possible) a false note in his work. Walz makes a close analysis of Meredith's early books up to the publication of his second volume of verse in 1862, to show that both the poetry and the novels reveal the gradual growth of the author's perceptions and are, in fact, biography of the kind that really helps us to understand his personality.

The judgment by distinguished critics of the poems of 1851 was on the whole favourable, but the vogue for classification was carried to the point of absurdity, and critics who were readiest to acknowledge merit in the work were most concerned to trace its dependence upon Tennyson, Keats, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Browning, Herrick, Shelley or

GEORGE MEREDITH

some other well-known poet. Every critic professed to find in the new author a pupil of some particular school instead of reading the poems for what they were and looking for something creative in them.

But what crushed Meredith was not the general verdict so much as the searching examination which he forced himself to undergo when he saw that no criticism, however kindly, recognised the poems as natural and original. We may see in them to-day the work of a devoted friend and observer of nature; not in broad, sweeping outline—the spirit of “Alastor” and “Endymion” is far removed from Meredith’s genius—but in the perfection of detail with which a landscape or other natural feature is presented:

And silvery the river runs,  
And many a graceful wind he makes,  
By fields where feed the happy flocks,  
And hedge-rows hushing pleasant lanes,  
The charms of English home reflected  
In his shining eye:  
Ancestral oak, broad-foliaged elm,  
Rich meadows sunned and starred with flowers,  
The cottage breathing tender smoke  
Against the brooding golden air. (Pastorals).

But elsewhere, especially when we meet with nature in low and fading tones—in twilight hours—we strike a note of sentimentalism: nature becomes a philosophical teacher, or reflects the personal feelings of the poet. We pass from the natural observation to the unfruitful ground of subjectivity:

Violets, shy violets!  
How many hearts with you compare!

GEORGE MEREDITH'S EARLY WORKS

Human hearts to me shall be  
Viewless violets in the grass,  
And as I pass,  
Odours and sweet imagery  
Will wait on mine and gladden me!<sup>1</sup>

Again, this rich adornment of natural description is used to clothe the love poems like "Love in the Valley," for love is the all-pervading theme; ideal, pure, spotless love; shy wooing, passion, emotion, egoism, and all the resources of the youthful lover; from the standpoint of the pursuer, not of the loved one. The root of the matter is that we detect behind these poems the sentimentalist, who is to be so ruthlessly unmasked in Meredith's riper works. Sentimental are all those who draw a veil over the naked truth, over something which it hurts them to reveal. The egoist covers his vanity with altruism, the lover his selfishness with emotion (Wilfrid), or his conceit with a pose (Alvan). Instead of seeking and facing facts, they all cultivate "nice feelings" and "fine shades" (the Pole sisters).

We find evidence in his next two books that Meredith's critical faculties had detected this sentimentalism of the early poems. It was a hard lesson; but from the thwackings, as Meredith would say, issued *The Shaving of Shagpat* and *Farina*. *The Shaving of Shagpat* was published at the end of 1855, and the hero, Shibli Bagarag, like the young Meredith, has a mission in life, but false lights mislead him; he underrates the strength and the entrenched positions of his enemy, he is undisciplined and self-deceived. Two things save him, after many thwackings and defeats: Noorna, his wife, and the gift of laughter. Laughter liberates us from the bonds of sentiment and emotion; it is the surest way of returning from illusions to truth and

<sup>1</sup> Violets.

sanity. The witch Goorelka has a great cage full of birds, who were formerly men and youths, and now they are bewitched. The spell can be broken by an hour's continuous laughter; then they are men again and take the form of men that are laughers. Of Sir Austin Feverel Meredith says: "for a good wind of laughter had relieved him of much of the blight of self-deception, and oddness and extravagance; had given him a healthier view of our atmosphere of life, but he had it not."

Meredith said once that the suggestion of an allegorical meaning in *Shagpat* must be rejected altogether, while on the other hand James McKechnie<sup>1</sup> has interpreted the allegory in full detail. This conflict of views can be reconciled, because, even if Meredith intended to do no more than tell an amusing story, he cannot help moralising in everything he writes; he even makes use of his ballads for sermonizing.

While in *Shagpat* and *Farina* Meredith's art has advanced so far as to attack the sentimental bogey, ideal love is still his theme as in the poems; woman is the divinity who inspires the hero and leads him to final achievement. Shibli Bagarag and Farina personate youthful egoism and extravagance, vanity, arrogance, priggishness, sensuality, while in Noorna and Margarita there is nothing base. Baba Mustapha, the babbler and bachelor, comes to a bad end because he tries to do the great work alone. So the book concludes:

Think ye, had he never known  
Noorna a belabouring crone,  
Shibli Bagarag would have shaved Shagpat?

Noorna is not chosen for her beauty, and herein lies the

<sup>1</sup> "Meredith's Allegory, *The Shaving of Shagpat*," by James McKechnie, London, 1910.

## GEORGE MEREDITH'S EARLY WORKS

contrast with Bhanavar the Beautiful, who, indeed, is not altogether bad (Meredith's women never are), but she has sinned and is therefore under a curse which accompanies her through life and which she can only expiate in death. Before the doom she was also pure and good; her love for the young captain Zurvan was virtuous and tender. But while Noorna had spent her youth in trying to get near to nature and reality, to use her judgment and follow the promptings of her mind, Bhanavar seldom looked below the surface of things, but lived for beauty alone. With the loss of her beauty Noorna wins her freedom. For Bhanavar, beauty is not only the highest good in itself, but she shrinks from no sacrifice to increase it, and so she follows, not the leading of her mind, but of her feelings, whose slave she has become. Like a wayward child she thinks only of herself and her wishes, she is no longer capable of judgment, but accuses her lover of insensibility and cowardice.

Shibli Bagarag set out upon his mission full of high hopes, which were not destroyed by the hail of sharp blows that fell upon him, and after escaping the consequences of his wilfulness and frequent relapses without disastrous loss, he reached at last the haven of freedom and understanding. His story holds a mirror to Meredith's own career: the youthful time at Neuwied, full of happy promise; then the failure to make good in Charnock's office, and the unburdening of his soul in the poems of 1851, the faults of which he visited so severely upon himself; finally his happy union with Marie Vulliamy. But, above all, we see reflected the tasks to which he devoted his life; the exposure of what was false in the world or had outlived its usefulness; the education of men and women towards a better order of society.

Compared with *Shagpat* the story of Farina is more

concrete in form, and the characters more psychologically drawn, for in *Shagpat* the people are mere abstractions, types of wisdom, foolishness, courage and sentiment; but the Goshawk and Farina have some personality; the one is the plain, matter-of-fact conqueror, who sees things as they are and acts according to the needs of the case; the other the dreamy sentimentalist, who fasts before the battle in fulfilment of a vow; while Goshawk strengthens himself for the fight with wurst, eggs and wine, shaking his head over Farina. "That is the way of those fellows: no upright, manly, take-the-thing-as-it-comes; but fly sky high whenever there is a dash on their heaven. What has his belly done to offend him? It will be crying out just when we want all quiet."

For the nice feelings of the poet about "violets, shy violets," the sentimental Farina is vicariously rebuked when he speaks of the white lilies. "They have a melancholy sweetness, friend. I think of whispering fays, and elf, and erl, when their odour steals through me. Do not you?"

"Nay, nor hope to till my wits are clear gone," was the Goshawk's reply. "To my mind, 'tis an honest flower . . . that has battled the devil in my nose this night." It is the emotional character of the poems which explains why Meredith wished to forget them. In a letter to Luigi in 1907 he complains about much of the bad poetry of the time, which only flourishes, as he says, because young men and women use it as a playground for their emotions.

That Meredith should choose the form of an Arabian Nights Entertainment for *Shagpat* and a medieval setting for his next book, *Farina*, was the outcome of the retired life which he was leading. A background in modern society would have been too unfamiliar to him; he was much safer in a land of fancy. There are two of the 1851 poems which

### GEORGE MEREDITH'S EARLY WORKS

deal with social problems, 'The Olive Branch' and 'London by Lamplight'; it is true that they are longer than anything else in the book, which may give some indication of Meredith's interest in social reform; but the signs are all too clear of youthful inexperience.

'The Olive Branch' celebrates the Great Exhibition of 1851, and prophesies a World Revolution quite in the spirit of Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*. The sea, over which the ship "Olive Branch" sails, is the grave of times gone by, in which love had no place, and from now forward the old and the new world, the Tropics and the Poles, North and South, stretch out hands of friendship; every ship that sails the sea is an "Olive Branch," and brings with its freight the love of nations for one another. Similarly, in 'London by Lamplight' we look away from all sad and degrading blots upon our metropolis towards a new morn,

All rapture and all pure delight;  
A garden all unknown to blight.

It was, in fact, a sound instinct which led Meredith at the outset of his literary career to choose a background not too concretely related to actual conditions.

Shibli Bagarag and Farina have this in common that both practise a trade which is generally despised in the land; these heroes of a world's redemption are, the one a barber and the other a maker of disinfectants, though later to be honoured as the discoverer of Eau de Cologne. To both Meredith says, "stand by your tackle, as a warrior stands by his arms." A man shall stand honourably by the vocation to which he is called, as Evan Harrington stood by his tailordom. It makes Farina wild to see all the fighting and the release of Margarita done by Goshawk, while he

#### GEORGE MEREDITH

himself is led off a prisoner, but his tackle brings him reward at last, for it is he who frees the city from the Devil's stench.

In *Farina* we meet for the first time with Meredith's judgment upon Catholicism; Monk Gregory is a dreamer who tries to purge the world from evil with his theological weapons. Satan taunts him: "What are eyes? Persuade yourself you're dreaming. You can do anything with a mind like yours, Father Gregory! And consider the luxury of getting me out of the way so easily, as many do." The monk wins a mock victory; he is an ascetic and, like Baba Mustapha, expects to drive evil out of the world without the wisdom which the love of a woman could give him. So he deludes himself into thinking that he has beaten Satan, because he has driven off his visible presence with his incantations, but he realises too late that Satan's essential quality is not the form in which he appears, but the stench with which he infects Cologne. *Farina* with his flasks enables Kaiser Heinrich to enter the infected city, and receives as his reward the hand of Margarita.

"The shadow of Monk Gregory was seen no more in Cologne. He entered the Calendar, and ranks next to St. Anthony."

#### THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL

Meredith's next book appeared in 1859 after the tragic failure of his first marriage. He has now found the direction in which he is to continue through his life as a writer on problems of modern society. The new inspiration rises out of the destruction of his private happiness. The image of his fallen goddess is lying in pieces and her niche is

GEORGE MEREDITH'S EARLY WORKS

empty in his heart. At the end of *Shagpat* he has written about women:

Were men clad in them, we should create  
A race not following, but commanding, Fate;

and in the concluding lines of *Farina*:

Would ye know the true *Farina*? Look for him who walks under the seal of bliss: whose darling is for ever his young sweet bride, leading him from snares, priming his soul with celestial freshness;

But how changed is the tone of the aphorisms on the first page of *Richard Feverel*! They read like outbursts of wrath against woman; she is the domesticated wild cat, ready like the lady in the fable to resume natural habits when there is a mouse to tear; she will be the last thing civilised by man. As Meredith seems later to have recognised, many of these aphorisms are hardly necessary to the story, and in the revision of 1896, he cut out those which were too much overcharged with caricature or bitterness.

It is interesting to notice that in a letter to Alice Meynell in 1903, he denied the close connection of the Pilgrim's Scrip with his own personality:

It is hard on me, that the 'Scrip' should be laid to my charge. These aphorisms came in the round of the pen, as dramatizings of the mind of the Systemmaker. I would not have owned to half a dozen of them;

and yet, a comparison of the aphorisms with passages in his letters of the time when *Richard Feverel* was written, leaves little room for doubting their personal character.

GEORGE MEREDITH

A break with those ideals of love, which were so powerful in *Shagpat* and *Farina* is characteristic of *Richard Feverel* throughout; it is presented in a form which is transitional in the author's work, and disappears when, after his first wife's death, Meredith gained a more balanced outlook. While previously his fancy had conceived feminine types which could under no conditions be realised, he came at length to give women their rightful place in a true perspective.

And whenever Meredith rises to a new level in his spiritual progress he knocks down his ladders. In *Shagpat* and *Farina* he chastises the sentimentalism of the poems, and now the ideal love of these fairy tales must go, for he has discovered that—

Young men take joy in nothing so much as the thinking women angels;

and then, the reflections on 'Miss Random': what a contrast here to 'London by Lamplight'!

The Baronet went to gaze at Ripton . . . he remembered how often he had compared his boy with this one; his own bright boy! And where was the difference between them? 'I daresay this one never positively plotted to deceive his father: he followed his appetites unchecked, and is internally the sounder of the two. Miss Random, I fear very much, is a necessary establishment.'

Till now all has been uplift, growth, optimism. In *Richard Feverel* all is destruction, criticism, pessimism. World reformation is the theme in *Shagpat*; evil is driven out, and the hero becomes liberator, conqueror and restorer of mankind; all with the help of his wife, Noorna bin

Noorka. Woman is the source of counsel and blessing; but in *Richard Feverel* she is the cause of all the mischief.

Sir Austin Feverel's "System" is based very much upon Herbert Spencer's articles on "Moral Education" which appeared in the *Quarterly Review* and elsewhere between 1854 and 1858. Meredith is not so much in the mood to dwell on the advantages of Spencer's plan as to bring out all the possible evil consequences which can arise from its improper application; but while the critics universally accept the story as proof of the failure of Sir Austin's system, a careful comparison with Spencer's treatment of the subject will show that it was not the system which failed, but the Baronet's experiment with it; the way in which he turned to it as a means of re-establishing himself after the breakdown of his married life. It was the system applied by a sentimentalist, whose ultimate aim, behind all masks and subterfuge, was directed not to his son but to himself. So Meredith says, "If, instead of saying, 'Base no system on a human being,' he had said, 'Never experimentalize with one,' he would have been nearer the truth of his own case."

Before the story begins Sir Austin Feverel had married his wife for love and taken into his home Denzil Somers, the poet.

He had opened his soul to these two. He had been noble Love to the one, and to the other perfect Friendship. He had bid them be brother and sister whom he loved, and live a Golden Age with him at Raynham. In fact, he had been prodigal of the excellences of his nature, which it is not good to be, and, like Timon, he became bankrupt, and fell upon bitterness. . . . Denzil Somers touched his guitar in the lady's chamber: they played Rizzio and Mary together, so that after five years

GEORGE MEREDITH

of marriage, and twelve of friendship, Sir Austin was left to his loneliness with nothing to ease his heart of love upon save a little baby boy.

In later novels Meredith's sentimental lovers, who have been disappointed over the impossible ideals with which they have endowed their loved ones, have ended their lives with suicide, but Sir Austin, "in the presence of that world, so different to him now, preserved his wonted demeanour, and made his features a flexible mask." In wife and friend the old world of his illusions had been destroyed, but he rescued himself into a new world through his son. "Wearing the mask" is the theme of the chapter entitled "Nursing the Devil." The system is pursued not for Richard's sake; "his son's ordeal is to be his own," and the Baronet is the centre, the pivot on which the story turns. The system breaks down through disregard of those dangers which Spencer foresaw. The heart of the sentimentalist "grasps the principle of human goodness"; but the cardinal fault against which Spencer warned is to believe that all men are good from birth. Absorption in the absolute, the perfect, is fatal to the whole system; it is typical of all those people, who think to make life easy by shutting their eyes to the light of experience. Spencer says: form a system, but adapt it to the individual; abide by the system, as a line of conduct, but do not forget the imperfections of children, parents, society; keep your beliefs in the ideal man, but do not expect to realise them. Sir Austin fulfils every time the first part of these maxims, but forgets the qualifying clauses, for the reason that he sees no limitations in himself.

Every higher impulse is measured by him according to its worth for the possessor, or according to the lofty feelings

### GEORGE MEREDITH'S EARLY WORKS

which it promotes in the mind of the sentimentalist, who can do no deed for its own sake. When he can bring himself to do some act of kindness or forgiveness he books it directly to his own account. Spencer teaches that parents are morally bound to make sacrifices; Sir Austin distorts the system, priding himself on the social and other sacrifices which he is making for his son, but when the moment for the crucial sacrifice comes at last, to extend to his son the hand of reconciliation, he refuses, under the pretext that his sacrifice has already been complete.

Spencer himself has pointed to the danger, that this egoism might creep into the heart of the educator, who must be adaptable enough to consider, not his own comfort, but how to find a new way to his pupil, and in case of need to mould the system afresh.

The sentimentalism which discloses itself in the poems of 1851 is a youthful failing; Meredith's critical faculty detected it and laid it bare in *Shagpat* and *Farina*; from them we have to learn that our feelings are a dangerous guide, and if uncorrected they will lead us through shams and delusions to final failure. But these faults of youth cling to Sir Austin in his riper years; his son Richard inherited his own share of them, and nature's voice, which came to him out of the tempest in the Rhine mountains, was too late to avert the final disaster.

The cynical Adrian enters at critical moments as the evil genius, the perverse agent of the "System." Lucy is the victim; too frank and innocent to understand the contriving ways of those about her, and forced by Richard, Adrian and Sir Austin, one after the other, to wear the mask for Richard's sake. Contemporary critics were dissatisfied with the tragical ending of the story; not one of them could see how it accords with the development of the drama and

GEORGE MEREDITH

becomes inevitable. Lucy is a child of nature, transplanted in a world of masqueraders, and called upon to submit to deceptions which she cannot understand. "Had she not so violently controlled her nature as she did," says Meredith, "she might have been saved." That the lessons of her life and personality will not be lost upon Richard, when she is no longer with him, we may understand from the last words of the book, in which we are told that he lies silent on his bed of sickness—"striving to image her on his brain." It was not till she was taken from him in death that he knew the treasures of her heart and strove to find direction from that image.

EVAN HARRINGTON

*Richard Feverel* was written at a time of crisis in the author's life, when his marriage for love, on which such bright hopes were fixed, had ended in tragic disillusionment; and with it the reign in his heart of the ideal woman, the "beauty that makes holy earth and air." The general view about women in *Richard Feverel* is the medieval one; she is, as we might say, a nasty piece of work. In *Evan Harrington* the author recovers his balance: liberating himself from false sentiment—from the worship of ideals which cannot possibly be realised—he now conceives for woman the rightful place which she may take in a practical world; it is well expressed in a letter which he wrote in 1905 to Mr. Hugh W. Strong:

I have not studied them more closely than I have men, but with more affection, a deeper interest in their enfranchisement and development, being assured that women of the independent mind are needed for any sensible degree of progress. They will so educate their

daughters, that these will not be instructed at the start to feel themselves naturally inferior to men, because less muscular, and need not have recourse to practise arts, feline chiefly, to make their way in the world.

*Evan Harrington* appeared serially in "Once a Week" from February to October, 1860. While *Shagpat* and *Richard Feverel* are masterpieces of originality, *Evan Harrington* marks a transition to a broader field in which the interests are not so closely concentrated on a single theme. Sir Austin Feverel was the dominating personality in a drama where everything natural and truthful was stifled. In *Evan Harrington* the rôle is taken over by a woman, the incomparable Louisa, Countess de Saldar; her opposites are Lady Jocelyn, Evan, Mrs. Mel, Rose Jocelyn and John Cogglesby; against these spontaneous types no sentimentalist will stand a chance: this time the stage is set for comedy.

In the breadth of his new material and his entry into the comic field Meredith comes at last into his own. He loves to measure a man's greatness by the way in which he can bear a heavy blow; in Sir Austin he showed us how the weakling takes it. The healthy reaction to a hard knock consists in opening the safety valve, and in laughter. *Richard Feverel* was the safety valve for Meredith's own misfortunes; the extravagance of the aphorisms about women and the almost too heartless pursuit of the sentimental worked the poison out of him. In *Evan Harrington* he can bring himself at last to laugh. From the austere in Sir Austin we sink to the ridiculous in Louisa. It is no accident when Meredith makes the unsentimental Lady Jocelyn say: "I acknowledge she's amusing." It is the last thing that could be said of Sir Austin that he is diverting; his hand is heavy upon everything that he

GEORGE MEREDITH

touches. Louisa loses in the course of the story more and more of her false dominion, and becomes at last the plaything of the whole circle which she aspires to rule. What a contrast between these two exponents of sentimentalism!

Again what a contrast in the judgment of women! Here we meet with sympathetic types, and in the treatment of the relations between men and women the humour is without sarcasm. We even meet with a suggestion (Chap. xii) which is not without its application to Meredith's private troubles, that Eve may not have been wholly to blame: that Adam, in fact, was not mature.

Notice this in passing: the innocent Mrs. Berry (O.R.F.) interposes at the crucial moment to seal the fate of Richard and Lucy, for "Alas! [It is the *Pilgrim's Scrip* interjecting], women are the born accomplices of mischief!" This bitterness turns to playfulness when the Countess (E.H., Chap. xiii) "relinquishes the joys of life for the joys of intrigue."

In comparing *Richard Feverel* with *Evan Harrington* we notice the subordinate rôle which Richard plays in the drama of Sir Austin, to whom Richard's misfortune is not the major concern, but the firmness and trustworthiness of his own mask. Sir Austin plays the part of Providence to his son, and discourages expressions of the boy's own personality. Evan, on the contrary, is the master of his fate, which he must work out in his own inner consciousness; so Evan casts himself free from sentimentalism while Richard succumbs.

MODERN LOVE AND POEMS OF THE ENGLISH ROADSIDE

This volume was published in 1862. It has already been indicated that the "Prometheus" motive of *Shagpat* and

## GEORGE MEREDITH'S EARLY WORKS

the scepticism of *Richard Feverel* begin to resolve themselves in *Evan Harrington*, and we see the liberating influences further at work in the Roadside Poems. The quaint humour of Meredith's humble philosophers is born of faith and a cheerful acceptance of life. Love is not a prominent motive: in 'The Old Chartist' and 'Juggling Jerry' the wife is just the trusty mate; in contrast with the preaching of *Shagpat* and the sarcasm of *Richard Feverel* the Roadside Poems breathe a spirit of tolerance and contentment; even sentimentalism is given a rest. Instead of the "grasp of the principle of human goodness," we read:

Some are fine fellows: some, right scurvy:  
Most, a dash between the two.

(*Juggling Jerry*.)

In his letter to Jessop (November 13, 1861) Meredith tells us something of his new method:

One result of my hard education since the publication of my boy's book in '51 (those poems were written before I was twenty) has been that I rarely write save from the suggestion of something actually observed. I mean, that I rarely write verse. Thus my Jugglers, Beggars, etc., I have met on the road, and have idealized but slightly. I desire to strike the poetic spark out of absolute human clay. And in doing so I have the fancy that I do solid work—better than a carol in mid-air.

Meredith the revolutionary has now become the supporter of sound traditions; the "Old Chartist" as he talks to the rat makes the wholesome confession:

You've done the right while I've denounced the wrong.

GEORGE MEREDITH

Base occupation  
Can't rob you of your esteem, old rat!  
I'll preach you to the British nation.

For Meredith, Providence was never the neglectful or even malignant spirit of the Pessimists. "There's a Juggler outjuggles all!" says Jerry, to whom "Juggler, constable, king, must bow," but Meredith's optimism is based upon a feeling that we are one with Nature, and

~~Earth knows no desolation.  
She smells regeneration  
In the moist breath of decay.~~

(*The Spirit of Earth*)

The pessimism of the sonnets in *Mod. 1860* almost in every detail with the ideas of the The latter are thoroughly optimistic in with things in general; the relations betw are confident and happy, but in the sonnet of the poet's imagination seems to collapse is the woman as the representative of the destroys his faith in the present and the is the subject of his bitter reproaches. Faith in of nature turns to despair at a revelation of its ci

Such a difference in poetry produced at the same time points to contrasts in the character of the poet. The *Road-side Poems* are the expression of the ideals which he sought to realise; while the sonnets are his honest revelation of himself. In the spirit of contentment on the one hand, and the confession of failure on the other, we see the inspiration of the prophet and the weakness of the man.

In the sonnets the man heaps reproaches on the wife for "the dead black years." The frightful part of it is, not so much that she has destroyed the present and the future

## GEORGE MEREDITH'S EARLY WORKS

for him, but she has made the old ideals seem illusions, and yet they will not leave him. In all the fifty sonnets there is hardly an admission of his own fault, or even any kind of self-examination. He is the one who has been fascinated, misled and wrecked by the wife; he lays bare her faults, tracing them to the remotest recesses of their origin, and the quest leads but to despondency and self-justification. It is only in the last sonnet that he takes to himself an equal share of blame. Elsewhere he is inclined to show the wife as the "devilish malignant witch," and to cover up his own faults; in fact, he goes so far as to give the impression that the man is a martyr at the hands of his wife. (*She treated him as something that is tame.*) He is continually the victim of her sinful beauty, which holds him in a "lower sphere," and here the poet reveals, against his will, his own share in the fault; for while he tries to keep his self-command and his good intentions, a glance at her beauty of face and figure, her shoulder, her curls, convicts him, in fact, of the egoism which he detects in her. So the tragedy has its roots not merely in her supposed weakness, but in his own unripe perception of the true nature of love. Love had been for him a rapture, and he did not realise that, if the benefits were to be lasting, the temporary pleasures of this lower sphere must unite with the mind's companionship and mutual help in life's activities.

Here we see him giving way in another form to those emotions which he chastises in the wife. Clouding of the perceptions through the feelings, and idealisation of what are in reality the lower passions, were his undoing. The man hates and accuses the sentimentalism which he is not strong enough to resist; and when he finds the same weakness in his wife he unloads his hatred with double weight upon her.

GEORGE MEREDITH

Her failure is, in fact, only greater because she is longer than he in finding out the error of them both. She goes on trying to cover up realities after he has searched them out. He sees the pitiful nakedness of their souls, and what before he had been able to cover with a kiss, he can no longer surround with a false glamour. "A kiss is but a kiss now!" They have both made the same mistake of idealising each other; but it is only he who had the courage to fight things out within himself, while she still wants to see him the same fairy prince as he appeared to her at first. She is too weak and her love too unreal that she can venture to love the man with all his faults.

When at last they "drank the daylight of honest speech"; in the moment when they are both determined to use this opportunity and he sees peace in sight, she is too weak for the effort, too much the woman to forget her jealousy and pass over small things for the sake of the greater reconciliation:

For when of my lost Lady came the word,  
This woman, O this agony of flesh!  
Jealous devotion bade her break the mesh,  
That I might seek that other like a bird.

It is just such a spell as hung over Lucy and Richard Feverel at their last meeting:

She had one terror, lest her heart should sigh,  
And tell her loudly she no longer dreamed.  
She dared not say, 'This is my breast: look in.'

Meredith unfolds this tragedy with an acuteness seldom found elsewhere in his writings. The imputations differ from the intemperate aphorisms of *Richard Feverel* through

## GEORGE MEREDITH'S EARLY WORKS

their loftiness and penetration, and are thereby all the more convincing. *Woman and love*, which in the poems of 1851 were an inspiration to growth and perfection, are now the annihilating and soul-destroying facts in the life of a man. Love sinks to a "matter of moods," and has nothing to do with real life. He who dreams that marriage is a life-time spent in the sunshine of love is crazy, and lost to all notions of common sense. We are born into the world as animals, we gain intelligence as we grow up, and that is the whole substance of life until we die. It is only the few who have the sense to grasp this: they are the "scientific animals." The rest sin against nature; they think they are nearest to nature and are in truth farthest away, and they get a rude awakening from their dream. Meredith seems even to give the impression that love is essentially temporary. Man is blind enough to believe that the passion can last, but nature cries, "I play for Seasons; not Eternities!"

\* \* \* \*

It is impossible in a summary like this to do adequate justice to this thesis of Dr. Walz. So far as the writer is aware, no other critic has so discerningly unravelled the threads which bind Meredith's personal life and experience with his early writings. It is important to observe that it is Meredith's education, not his character, which is here discussed. Mr. J. B. Priestley, writing about Meredith's later work, says:

The people who are wrong in Meredith's novels are more arresting than the people who are right, not merely because the Comic Spirit singles them out and magnifies them to us, but because they have actually more of Meredith's own self in them. Even when they are made

GEORGE MEREDITH

detestable and are cruelly handled, as Sir Willoughby is, there is plain evidence that the judge has placed himself in the dock. Men of a large nature never hit so hard as when they turn upon themselves, lashing what they consider, in their wiser and cooler moments, some secret vice. . . . Vernon Whitford could never have written *The Egoist*, because he could never have seen enough. Although he was living with an egoist, he had not lived with one so intimately as George Meredith had. . . . There is a good deal of Meredith himself even in Sir Austin Feverel. As for the delightful snobs and pretenders, such as the Countess de Saldar and Richmond Roy, they are so vitally created, towering as they do above the more sensible characters, just because there is so much of their creator's temperament in them. . . . Meredithian Comedy ends by making us examine ourselves, because it is the creation of a man who began by examining his own secret self.

It would, however, be quite a mistake to suggest that Meredith was himself the typical sentimental and egoist, or in these respects different from the rest of us. The faults to which he directed our attention were not in any special degree his own; they lie deeply rooted in the nature of us all. If it is true that Vernon Whitford could not have written *The Egoist*, it may be still more truly said of Sir Willoughby Patterne, Sir Austin Feverel or Cornelia Pole. O, Sage of Mirth!

These are the children of the heart untaught  
By thy quick founts to beat abroad, by thee  
Untamed to tone its passions under thought,  
The rich humaneness reading in thy fun.  
Of them a world of coltish heels for school  
We have; a world with driving wrecks bestrewn.

GEORGE MEREDITH'S EARLY WORKS

Adam Brendel, in his paper on the technique of Meredith's novels (Munich, 1912), says:

Just as Goethe went through a subjective Werther period, rich with inner experience, and then gradually threw it off, so must there have been in Meredith's early life Promethean spells of wilfulness and suffering. Only a man who has known in his own being a profound development could unfold to us with such psychological discernment the history of hopeful but ever erring youth. Meredith has shown us in most of his novels the advance of young men from subjectivity to an objective outlook on life. On every page we may see how the author handles these spiritual contests with the loving sympathy of one who has fought the battle out in himself.

Kant, like Herbert Spencer, wrote a famous essay on education, and struck chords which find an echo in Meredith's philosophy.

A man, he said, can only grow to manhood through education; he is nothing apart from what education makes of him. . . . Is man by nature morally good or bad? Neither the one nor the other, for by nature he is not a moral being at all, he only becomes so when his reason has developed ideas of duty and law. We can thus say that originally he has in his nature impulses to all the vices, for he has inclinations and instincts which urge him in one direction, although reason drives him the opposite way.

## *Chapter XX*

### GEORGE MEREDITH AND THE MARRIAGE PROBLEM

By MARIE MOLL. BERLIN, 1933

THE problems and the attempts at their solution, which play a prominent part in the novels of George Meredith, were immanent in his time, for in human history a reform is never the invention of a single man, but if favoured by circumstances it finds an advocate in a powerful and courageous personality. So Meredith was the mouthpiece of Victorian society at a time when Mary Wollstonecraft, Ruskin, John Stuart Mill, Harriet Martineau, Beatrice Harraden (*Ships that pass in the Night*) and others had taken up the cause of women, and Mrs. Norton, the model for *Diana of the Crossways*, had told in her pamphlet, "English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century" (1854) and in her "Letter to the Queen," the story of her unhappy marriage and had advocated a change of the existing laws.

Progress, according to Meredith, is hindered by the existing relations of the sexes. The woman must submit to her husband, who claims independence and authority for himself alone. Being forced to devote herself exclusively to the house and to motherhood, her mental development becomes restricted and the progress of the race suffers. So in all the novels the author appeals to women to become

#### THE MARRIAGE PROBLEM

the comrades of their husbands. Meredith maintains their cause not merely out of sympathy, but because he believes that love and marriage cannot be perfect unless there is complete equality in the relations of man and wife, and particularly equality in mental attainments.

Blood and brain and spirit, three  
(Say the deepest gnomes of Earth),  
Join for true felicity.

*(The Woods of Westermain.)*

And in love, more particularly than in all other human affairs, it is dangerous to separate these three elements.

Scientific enlightenment in the nineteenth century often manifested itself in a sombre pessimism and unsettlement in matters of faith; but Meredith wins through to a victorious optimism. He is the prophet of a spiritual, moral and social evolution; his optimism springs from the newly-recognised fact that man is not yet perfect, but capable of advancement. He does not look with mistrust or dejection at our primitive origins, but sees first of all the capacity to grow and rise higher. He expresses his conviction of the progress of mankind: "History has to be taken from far backward, if we would gain assurance of man's advance."

In a short biographical sketch Dr. Moll enquires: What were the causes which induced Meredith at the age of twenty-one to marry a woman nine years older than himself? He lost his mother at the age of five, and when he was thirteen, his father (to whom he had been till then attached), married again. Perhaps he became jealous, because we may see that in later life he was only able to concentrate his affections upon a single person. In his school

GEORGE MEREDITH

days at Neuwied there were no contacts with the other sex, and it is natural that his own experiences should have led him in later years to advocate the co-education of boys and girls.

So perhaps his first marriage was prompted by a longing for that motherly love which he had missed in his upbringing, added to which there was a sincere admiration for Mary Nicolls' intellectual gifts. The time was bound to come when his consciousness would be awakened to the false foundations of this marriage and when the uneven temperaments of this "ever diverse pair" would get on each other's nerves.

Meredith is generally represented as a radical champion of women's rights, claiming unreservedly their freedom and independence. He is certainly the friend of women and has done much for their interests, but it is possible to exaggerate his feminism; one should rather observe that he is sometimes only raising points for discussion and not expressing definite views. He claims freedom for the wife, freedom of mind and will, and equal rights as the foundation for true love, for if a man will not give his wife the freedom to decide, she will not be capable of perfect love. If one looks at Meredith's works a little closer, one will find that his attitude to life and his views about women are essentially masculine. The freedom which he demands for women is to enable their intellectual qualities to gain more influence in society; they are to give up their sentimentalism and gain thereby in moral courage and mental power; so as to become fit comrades of sensible men. It is always as comrades that they fulfil for men a satisfactory relation. The husband's duty is to *serve the world*, to love his wife and to help her; the wife's to *serve her husband*, to love him and to help him. It is true that Meredith's women

#### THE MARRIAGE PROBLEM

break their chains, revolt against the egoist or the hypocrite who has caught them in his meshes, and tear away his mask, but it is all done so that they may become the wives of more capable men and saner philosophers. However great their courage and brilliant their mental gifts, these women are not here for their own benefit, or in their independence to serve the world. It is always the same old story of finding the right comrade for a man's life. Clara and Aminta are bold enough to escape from prison, but they do not flee into the wide world; they come to the side of a Whitford or a Weyburn, and, once in his protection, they are no longer exceptions socially, they look up to their husbands, admire them and are led by them.

Diana's story leads also to the same final conclusion, although Meredith admitted the trouble which the last chapter cost him. He debated whether he would allow her to die unmarried; perhaps to the reader it would have seemed simpler and more natural; but to him as psychologist, exploring the labyrinth of a woman's soul, this solution would have been banal and unsatisfying.

On the subject of marriage reform it is important again to think that Meredith is sometimes posing questions for discussion rather than giving his own solution. He was no radical reformer; he had too much respect for social traditions. An interview which he gave to the *Daily Mail* in 1904 gave rise to the view that he, like Colney Durance,<sup>1</sup> favoured a seven-years' limit for marriages; but he himself said of that "exceedingly dark gentleman," that no one ever knew whether he was speaking seriously or not.

<sup>1</sup> *One of Our Conquerors.*

## *Chapter XXI*

### GEORGE MEREDITH'S INTERPRETATION OF NATURE IN HIS POEMS

By WALTRUD ZEDDIES. BORNA-LEIPZIG, 1934

SYMONS speaks rightly (*Westminster Review*, 1887) of the veiled nearness and intimacy of the great mother of us all—Earth; but when he continues, “we scarcely know after all whether to call this pagan and primitive or modern and scientific,” he is misleading. The close union of man with Earth springs obviously as in Meredith's poem, ‘Earth and Man,’ from a simple feeling and not from a scientific hypothesis that man has been evolved out of the earth. It is not the clever man, conscious of his reasoning powers, but rather the child-like mind, which discovers the links of our life with nature. This is a purely romantic thought, found also in Goethe and Wordsworth. Nature is personified, and

Till we conceive her living we go distraught.<sup>1</sup>

Meredith was closely linked in thought with Carlyle:

But this do I say, and would wish all men to know and  
lay to heart, that he who discerns nothing but Mechanism

<sup>1</sup> *Sense and Spirit.*

## INTERPRETATION OF NATURE

in the Universe has in the fatallest way missed the secret of the Universe altogether;

and with Emerson:

Behind nature, through nature, spirit is present.

Nature not only unites us but makes us brothers; from this thought of union follows fellowship, love and sympathy. Sympathy plays a similar part with the idealists and romantic writers. Nature is "ever an old friend, ever like a dear friend and brother," exclaims Emerson, thrilled with his feelings for nature, and here he strikes clearly the true note of the romantic poet. Where the mind directs, nature becomes a friend; by holding fast the thought of our brotherly relationship to stones, plants, living creatures, clouds and stars, the romantic poet opens up for himself a path to nature, not as a ruler, but as one who is in sympathy and harmony. Goethe speaks in this sense of "loving sympathy" with nature, and says that the nature-philosopher must "seek with all loving, reverent, pious endeavours to penetrate nature and its holy life."

Goethe's precept finds the fullest recognition in Meredith's poems. He is not an objective observer of nature as Henderson and Cunliffe represent—however much he strives for "the disciplined habit to see." Tesche aptly speaks of the "objective-subjective attitude of mind" which Meredith has in common with the romantic poets. By objective-subjective he understands that genuinely romantic disposition by which man (the subject) allows his feelings to pass over into nature and by which conversely, man wakens to the sound of nature's voice.

The feeling of the profound unity between man and nature gives rise to interchanges which declare them to be

GEORGE MEREDITH

dependent upon each other. The thought that nature uplifts and calms us is already found in the pre-romantic poets, Thomson, Akenside and others. Joseph Warton says that the whole of nature strives

To raise, to soothe, to harmonize the mind.

But the idea of a reciprocal working between man and nature is peculiar to Meredith, and finds its most beautiful expression in the short poem, 'Nature and Life,' in which we see at the same time the scope of this interchange. Nature gives us "breath," for which we offer in return "a mind."

Breath which is the spirit's bath  
In the old Beginnings find,  
And endow them with a mind,  
Seed for seedling, swathe for swathe.  
That gives Nature to us, this  
Give we her, and so we kiss.

Both Goethe and Meredith find tongues in trees, and each has left us a "Dirge in Woods," in which we may perceive the similarities as well as the contrasts of their art and philosophy.

Über allen Gipfeln  
Ist Ruh',  
In allen Wipfeln  
Spürest du  
Kaum einen Hauch;  
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde.  
Warte nur, balde  
Ruhest du auch.

INTERPRETATION OF NATURE

Hush'd on the hill  
Is the breeze;  
Scarce by the Zephyr  
The trees  
Softly are press'd;  
The wood bird's asleep on the bough.  
Wait, then, and thou  
Soon wilt find rest.      Tr. by E. A. Bowring.

Nothing in the national literature of any country is better known than these lines are known to German people. They are subjective like some of Meredith's early poems, as *Violets shy Violets* and

The moon is alone in the sky  
As thou in my soul.

The poet is thinking of himself; "he leaves the world to darkness and to me"; in fact, for all that the woods mean to him he might as well be sitting in a country churchyard. Meredith could not conceive a wood as the symbol of lifelessness. It is "enchanted"; densely populated; as in *The Woods of Westermain, or Outer and Inner*:

From twig to twig the spider weaves  
At noon his webbing fine.  
So near to mute the zephyrs flute  
That only leaflets dance.  
The sun draws out of hazel leaves  
A smell of woodland wine.  
I wake a swarm to sudden storm  
At any step's advance.

GEORGE MEREDITH

My world I note ere fancy comes,  
Minutest hushed observe:  
What busy bits of motioned wits  
Through antlered mosswork strive.  
But now so low the stillness hums,  
My springs of seeing swerve,  
For half a wink to thrill and think  
The woods with nymphs alive.

Meredith took Goethe's lines and refashioned them:

A wind sways the pines,  
And below  
Not a breath of wild air;  
Still as the mosses that glow  
On the flooring and over the lines  
Of the roots here and there.  
The pine-tree drops its dead;  
They are quiet, as under the sea.  
Overhead, overhead  
Rushes life in a race,  
As the clouds the clouds chase;  
And we go,  
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,  
Even we,  
Even so.<sup>1</sup>

The thought is similar, the choice of metre imitative, but how different the presentation! It is the contrast between a picture and a drama. Death comes as a momentary sensation, the thump of a fir cone on the mossy flooring, then all is quiet again below, while overhead life rushes on. And we drop like the fruits of the tree, for our lives are fruits bearing seed. These lines evoke the sad reflection that Meredith's poetry is practically unknown in Germany.

<sup>1</sup> *Dirge in Woods.*

## *Chapter XXII*

### MEREDITH'S WOMEN CHARACTERS

By ERNA BIERIG. DÜSSELDORF, 1936

DR. BIERIG quotes this remark from T. S. Eliot's *Essays on Criticism*:

No poet, no artist of any art has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone, you must set him for contrast and comparison among the dead.

Accordingly the work of Thackeray and George Eliot is to be analysed as a preparation for the study of Meredith. Thackeray gives us a mirror of society over a wide field; his *Vanity Fair* is a "very vain, wicked, foolish place, full of all sorts of humbug, and falseness and pretensions." And the creator of this comedy comes on to the stage with his own characters, just as Meredith does, and interrupts the play with explanations in order to give clearer expression to the moral which is being conveyed. The reader, therefore, feels throughout the nearness of the author, who interprets and teaches; but his characters are types rather than personalities; and the distinction must be noticed here, that while Thackeray uses satire, Meredith's weapon is the Comic Spirit.

GEORGE MEREDITH

Thackeray knows the thoughts and feelings of his people, the secrets of Amelia's heart and the motives for the wicked, selfish tricks of her friend Becky. But there is a complete absence of serious psychology; it is not necessary in a treatment which only presents opposing types, one-sided and simple, black and white.

The good-natured humour and the lively satire of Thackeray are for Meredith's keen perception of the comic spirit too crude and obvious. It is significant here to quote Meredith's criticism of his predecessor's art in the preface which he wrote for Thackeray's *The Four Georges*:

The social world he looked at did not show him heroes, only here and there a plain good soul. He described his world as an accurate observer saw it, he could not be dishonest. He was driven to the satirical task by the scenes about him. There must be the moralist in the satirist, if satire is to strike. The stroke is weakened and art violated when he comes to the front. Thackeray restrained him as much as could be done.

Meredith qualifies his commendation, because he is conscious of the fact that art had advanced a step since Thackeray wrote. As a critic of society Thackeray could only use the cruder weapon of satire. He seems himself to have realised that the society novel, which he had brought to such perfection, had in it possibilities for further development, for he says in *Vanity Fair*:

The frantic efforts, which women make to enter society, the meannesses to which they submit, the insults which they undergo, are matters of wonder to those who take human- or womankind for a study; and the pursuit of fashion under difficulties would be a fine theme for any

very great person who had the wit, the leisure, and the knowledge of the English language for the compiling of such a history.

Meredith is undoubtedly this "very great person," of whom Thackeray prophetically speaks; he possesses just those qualities, "the wit, the leisure and the knowledge of the English language." It was probably in allusion to these words of Thackeray that Meredith wrote in *Diana of the Crossways*:

A great modern writer, of clearest eye and head, now departed, capable in activity of presenting thoughtful women, thinking men, groaned over his puppetry, that he dared not animate them, flesh though they were, with the fires of positive brainstuff. He could have done it, and he is of the departed! Had he dared, he would (for he was Titan enough) have raised the Art in dignity on a level with History, to an interest surpassing the narrative of public deeds as vividly as man's heart and brain in their union excel his plain lines of action to eruption.

We find serious psychological studies for the first time in the novels of George Eliot; she traces the most subtle delineations of the human heart, true to reality. This new method of psychological analysis is a leading characteristic of George Eliot's art and places her in a position intermediate between Thackeray and Meredith. Moreover her characters express themselves in their words and actions; a chorus is unnecessary; she does not, like Thackeray, intervene. But she prefers, as she says herself, to describe "Commonplace things. . . . There are few prophets in the world, few sublimely beautiful women, few heroes; I can't afford to give all my love and reverence to such

#### GEORGE MEREDITH

rarities; I want a great deal of those feelings for my everyday fellowmen." The play of intellectual forces is in consequence absent from George Eliot's studies of peasant types; while for Meredith, love and life are incomplete unless there is a union of *brain* with the other two components of our nature, *blood* and *spirit*. The spirit of Comedy was foreign to the nature of George Eliot's art, and in this respect she is not the equal of her predecessor, Jane Austen.

The strength, and at the same time the weakness, of Meredith's art is the introduction of the poetic element into the form of the novel. Symbolism and poetry are for him helps to realism; "the rightly poetic is only another language for the flat prose."<sup>1</sup> In this he violates the accepted canons of prose writing. The style which he elaborated shows him in strong contrast to Flaubert, who raised the art of writing prose to elevations previously unattained. The search for a new artistic principle in the novel is common to both Meredith and Flaubert. The latter, by a strict observance of the laws and limits of pure prose, tried to set up the most perfect model for this branch of art. His is the language of everyday speech, which is to him the only medium for portraying background, for making known his own thoughts and his own personality. So the meaning of his words, which Flaubert chose with the greatest deliberation, is contained entirely in themselves. His prose knows no poetic symbol as a means of expression. He never intrudes himself in his work as Meredith does. His novel is a clear, smoothly flowing account, never interrupted. We perceive in it the objectivity of the ideal storyteller, who hides himself behind his work and allows only his characters to communicate his thoughts.

<sup>1</sup> From Meredith's introduction to the poems of Dora Sigerson-Shorter.

The Meredithian novel does not accept the strict limits fixed by prose. Far from conforming to Flaubert's ideal, epigrams and exuberance of illustrations are indispensable to Meredith's creative genius. The play of thought between the individual and general is always present, because he is not content to leave the inferences to suggest themselves. While Thackeray found explanations necessary to help the understanding of his readers, Meredith interrupts the story to add his own personal reflections. Here we can easily find a relationship to Jean Paul Richter, whose works Meredith knew and valued. Jean Paul's ideal, too, was far removed from that of a storyteller pure and simple. He breaks off the relation to pour out his own thoughts, and however valuable these reflections may be, like the epigrams of Meredith, they stray beyond the boundaries of the pure prose form.

It is therefore easy to understand that those critics who in their judgment insist upon the strict Flaubertian standard of prose writing, must condemn Meredith's subjective art. These are the critics who have not only regarded Meredith's method as a departure from the traditional form, but have found it false in principle in its application to the field of prose. Arthur Symons, who was no doubt taught in Flaubert's school, finds himself obliged, in his *Studies in Prose*, to condemn Meredith's method in the novel, while at the same time he cannot withhold his admiration.

"I find Meredith," he says, "breaking every canon of what are to me the laws of the novel, and yet I read him in preference to any other novelist. The fascination of Meredith is not, I think, quite inexplicable. It is the unrecognised, incalculable attraction of those qualities, which go to make great poetry, coming to us in the disguise of prose. It is thus by the very quality which has been his distraction that Meredith holds us."

GEORGE MEREDITH

Bierig gives in some hundred closely written pages a penetrating study of Meredith's women characters. In a review of *Evan Harrington* she writes:

The figure of the heroine, Rose Jocelyn, denotes something quite new in Meredith's art and indeed in the history of the English novel. Rose, 'the brilliant young Amazon,' is very different from Lucy Feverel, or from Amelia and Becky Sharp. At the very outset, in her talk on the ship with her friend Evan Harrington, before taking her departure from him, she reveals the thoroughly lively, unsentimental fresh youthfulness, which is the essence of her nature. Why should she be sad about parting from Evan, when her parents' house is open to him at any time for a visit? 'Won't you promise me to come and stop with us for weeks? Haven't you said we would ride and hunt and fish together and read books and do all sorts of things? . . . Why, you dear sentimental boy! You don't suppose we could see each other every day *for ever*?' In these few lines we recognise at once the new type of woman who is henceforth to be the heroine of Meredith's art. These unconcerned, natural words of a comrade present a relationship between young people which till then was unknown in the literature of the English novel. All young people, whom Meredith creates, meet each other quite unembarrassed on a basis of friendship; because Meredith believes that true love can only develop out of friendship, and this kind of love is the real education of the individual, who by seeking to understand the loved one learns to know his own self. Rose Jocelyn is no soft young maiden; one realises at once that her broad education and natural gifts have developed her to become not merely conventional, but a personality. She began to be conscious of herself as she gazed before her on the deck, saying, 'I am sure I can't understand you. It is

because I am a girl, and I never shall till I am a woman.' Rose's development from maiden to woman is a long process; the awakening of her love to consciousness a particularly difficult unfolding, because it comes as a complete surprise to the comrade 'who smiled on many' that friendship can pass over into love. 'With Rose love will be full grown when it is once avowed, and will know where to go to be nourished.'

"Rose would not abandon her friends, because she accepted a lover." She has no idea of retiring into the shy, fancy world of the sentimental betrothed one. In spite of the love which she feels she remains the same comrade of the other men in sport and play. This attitude of mind is a fundamentally new one for the heroine of an English novel. Also the fact that Rose goes first to her mother with the secret of her love shows how Meredith tries to search the feminine heart for capacities till then unexplored, and to make them known through his works.

Thackeray is the spiritual ancestor of Meredith; therefore *Evan Harrington* and *Vanity Fair* are nearly related: they differ in respect of the moralising humour of Thackeray and Meredith's conception of the Comic Spirit. "This is a Comedy," says Meredith, "and I must not preach lessons of life here. . . . Art is violated when the moralist comes to the front."

Of Bierig's excellent commentary on *The Egoist* it is only possible here to give some of the opening lines:

Meredith's ideas, in which love and the reactions of different personalities form the groundwork, are developed in his novels through the behaviour of his characters in society. Consequently, it would be impossible to imagine a novel of Meredith's without women. For

example, the revolutionary ideas of Nevil Beauchamp find their chief expression in his relations to Cecilia Halkett and Jenny Denham. In *Sandra Belloni* and its sequel *Vittoria* the struggle for freedom of the Italian people is figuratively presented in the heroine's vindication of her personality. But her personality could only be unfolded in the experience of love, which she learned at last, after a fiery ordeal, to understand. In *The Egoist*, which appeared in 1879, the author makes love itself, which in the other novels was serviceable to the main theme, the one and only study. Everything centres round the question: what really is the nature of love, how we may rightly embrace it, and what, on the other hand, it cannot be?

A masterly hand moves comic and pathetic figures, like marionettes, upon the stage, and only two characters are presented for serious consideration. When the curtain falls, we learn that the Comic Muse, sitting beside Clara and Vernon, 'is grave and sisterly. But taking a glance at the others of her late company, she compresses her lips.'

Bierig points out in conclusion how few there are who will take the necessary pains to understand Meredith's exuberant genius, and perhaps the English (as Ramon Fernandez suggests)<sup>1</sup> appreciate least their Celtic poet-novelist. Fernandez thinks that even to-day new friends could be won for Meredith, because his work is never out of date. He knew himself that he could not appeal to the mass of the public. "My way," he said, "is like a Rhone island in the summer drought, stony, unattractive and difficult between the two forceful streams of the unreal and the over-real, which delight mankind."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A propos* Meredith. "La Nouvelle Revue Francaise," Mai, 1931.

<sup>2</sup> *Beauchamp's Career*, p. 552.

PART II

THE RELATION OF THE SEXES  
IN THE NOVELS OF  
GEORGE MEREDITH

BY

GRETA GRIMSEHL



## INTRODUCTION

DR. GRIMSEHL, writing in 1924, begins with a reference to the centenary of George Meredith's birth, which England would be celebrating on the 12th of February, 1928. We Germans, she says, think of him, not so much as a representative of Victorian culture and achievement, but rather as the herald of modern ideas. We feel that the problems which he handled are those of to-day, and we are inclined to reckon him as one of our own generation. He was far ahead of his time—a fact which partly explains the want of appreciation of his books by the general public—and he is rather to be compared with the authors of the opening twentieth century than with Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot. Without being too didactic he succeeded in making his novels "the elect handmaiden of his philosophy," and expressing in them his personal outlook on life. In his works we see reflected the problems which exercised the scientific brains of his day. Free from any sort of Victorian sentimentality, he chose for himself and for the characters which he created the intellect as guide; he criticised human society, with its virtues and its weaknesses, discerningly and objectively. As an "optimistic reformer" he set up ideals which take account of the social and scientific perceptions of a new age, and are dictated by the head and not by the feelings. The themes which he chooses correspond exactly with the advancement of his intellectual outlook.

#### THE MAIN PROBLEM

The place which the sexes should occupy in human society (and especially the case of the woman), and their relations to each other: "the battle of the sexes," this is the kernel of Meredith's problem, around which everything else, whether in the novel or in real life, groups itself, and on which the weal and woe of the individual and of society as a whole depends. This, according to him, is the point where the lever must grip, in order to raise the human community to a higher level. Through all his works this *motiv* runs like a coloured thread, to become at length in the last four great novels the exclusive thought. It reaches such a commanding importance in Meredith's art, and has brought him from his contemporaries in equal measure so much praise and blame, admiration and disparagement, that it is proposed in the present work to discuss his attitude to it.

The average English novelist handled with somewhat bashful timidity this theme of man and wife, of love and marriage and of the rights of the individual. Leaving out of account erotic writings, the treatment of which was distasteful, not only to Englishmen in general, but also to Meredith with his sound and natural intuition in sexual matters, the average Victorian remained in his outlook, or at any rate in his literature, conventional, notwithstanding the numerous types of modern men and women represented in novels of the later period. What led Meredith, then, to direct his special interest and his literary abilities to these questions? For it is not exactly the old sweet song of the

#### INTRODUCTORY

joys and sorrows of love that he set to music, though, fortunately he had enough romantic endowment to find the softest melodies even for this; but it is the sociological, evolutionist point of view from which he regarded his subject and which made him a teacher and reformer of human society. This starting point seems easy to understand when we remember that we are concerned with the century of Comte, Darwin, Mill and Spencer, and Meredith is rightly recognised as the "poet of evolution." He is a fervent believer in the theory, and his confidence in human progress makes him a meliorist. The belief in a better world beyond the grave was tottering, and therefore our "love of Earth" should be all the stronger.

Life is but a little holding  
Lent to do a mighty labour.

(V., 206.)

This verse from *Vittoria* was inscribed on Meredith's urn, and does in fact express the whole man. Life is short, but through our deeds we can lend it lasting worth. Meredith did not become a fatalist and gloomy pessimist like Thomas Hardy, his fellow countryman, whom he esteemed so highly; the newly-won consciousness of the existence, growth and decay of human races filled him, on the contrary, with greater optimism, pointing new ways for higher development, opening up the prospect to unlimited possibilities. "Nicht nur fort sollst du dich pflanzen, sondern hinauf!" that, too, was the chord he struck. Mankind shall rise out of the primitive original state in which it is still only too sadly entangled. Through the inequality of the sexes in society, where the primitive relation of the hunter to his quarry still holds sway, progress is restricted. So long as men and women cannot develop on a basis of

GEORGE MEREDITH

equality, both are hindered from doing their best for mankind. The inferiority of the woman, which Meredith regards as a consequence of man's egoism, must first of all disappear. He sets up a new ideal in his works, and creates human types capable of realising it.

(a) *The Cause of the Women*

The cause of the women becomes for him one of immense importance. Thus, he writes as late as 1905 to H. W. Strong: "Since I began to reflect I have been oppressed by the injustice done to women, the constraint put upon their natural aptitudes and their faculties, generally much to the degradation of the race. I have not studied them more closely than I have men, but with more affection, a deeper interest in their enfranchisement and development" (L., 562). Mind, heart and abilities he devotes to the weaker sex. His clear intellect detects the intrinsic evil, the false position in which women are placed; the injurious effect of this upon society. His sense of justice manifests itself in the deep sympathy which fills his heart for the subordinate and dependent sex, his sisters. Thirdly, his intellectual and poetical nature delights in women who are beautiful and highly intelligent. The result has been that English literature may thank Meredith for a group of magnificent women characters, not unworthy to set by the side of Shakespeare's women. In a letter of 1888 he gives expression to his attitude as follows: "Women who read my books have much to surmount in the style, and when they have mastered it and come to the taste, I am well assured of their having discovered in me one who is much at heart with them. I have this feeling for women, because, what with nature and the world, they are the most heavily burdened" (L., 418/19). But it is not only feelings of

#### INTRODUCTORY

justice and sympathy which make Meredith an advocate of the women's cause. Here again we recognise that he is moved by nineteenth century ideas of the progress of the race and of culture, and he hopes to promote these ideas by solving the question of the women. Thus we read in his letters: "Women of the independent mind are needed for any sensible degree of progress" (L., 562), then again of the "changes for the race" (L., 419), and, "these young women are promising well for the future of the race" (L., 550). Again, "so there is hope that the coming generation will have more intelligent mothers" (L., 557). For, as he thought, "at present our civilisation is ill-balanced, owing to a state of things affecting women, which they may well call subjection" (L., 596). Already in 1877, before his last novels appeared, we find in the E. on C. some of Meredith's precepts. Thus, we hear that the comic poet feels himself repelled by the "marked social inequality of the sexes" (E. on C., 8); and that cultivated women will wish "to move on an intellectual level with men" (E. on C., 28). With subtle irony Meredith asks, "is it not preferable to be the pretty idiot, the passive beauty, the adorable bundle of caprices, very feminine, very sympathetic, of romantic and sentimental fiction? Our women are taught to think so" (E. on C., 29). But he teaches them to be free, to use their intelligence, and in the battle with man, or side by side with him, to control their own destiny. Meredith was not above using his talent in this service for the betterment of relations between the sexes. He has done his best; let women now follow his appeal. "I have tried in my time to enlighten them and humanize their males" (L., 531). A better education, economic independence, a broader field of interests, will bring the aspirations of the wife nearer to those of her

GEORGE MEREDITH

husband, she will be united with him in the similarity of their ideals. Man and wife will accomplish twice as much when they work together, or at least when each has the intelligence to appreciate the work of the other. Union of man and wife is the foundation of the state; the first condition for its prosperity is a healthy relationship between the sexes. Meredith discussed in his day problems of education and later training of the individual, as well as the theme of love and marriage, with an acuteness which we should recognise even to-day as completely modern; and he reached conclusions beyond which we have not yet advanced; they are still being taught by our sociologists and have not yet found the acceptance which they deserve. The group is still small of the intelligent, who possess a social conscience, and who lend the ear to such "heretical" teaching. Especially in England, the home of the "Island Pharisees," where one generation after another seems still to inherit something of the old puritanical spirit, we have yet to wait for a fair, fervent and unreserved acceptance of Meredith's novels. The days when his work and intentions provoked moral indignation and met with incomprehension are now happily over. Instead of the "immoral," it is now the technical difficulties which repel the average reader, or at any rate restrict the full enjoyment of his books. It is with profound regret that this fact must be admitted, for we are dealing with one of England's greatest writers, who expounds a philosophy, which even to-day offers to the modern thinker a wealth of interest and content.

*(b) Love and Marriage*

The problem of love and marriage is closely linked with that of women's rights, and a remark about Edward

#### INTRODUCTORY

Carpenter's book, *Sex Love*, shows how deeply Meredith took the problem to heart: "I read the little brochure as soon as received and with great satisfaction to find these wholesome truths plainly put. I have for forty years harped on them, but the literary rounding of the theme in the mirror of fiction cannot be so useful as the directer method. I hope it will be circulated widely, and I respect the writer" (L., 462, 1894).

We know very little about Meredith's relations with women, indeed his life in general is only known in merest outline. We get for the first time a closer glimpse of his friendships and family life through the publication in 1912 of his letters. This much is known: his first marriage with Mary Ellen Nicolls, the daughter of the well-known author, Thomas Love Peacock, was very unhappy. They separated after nine years of married life. In 1861 his wife died, and we can safely assume that those bitter years gave the occasion for the sonnets *Modern Love*, and his own marriage is reflected in the "faith unfaithful" story of this couple, who came together in a marriage of love and then gradually fell apart; who cannot separate because they are chained together, not only by the obligations of law and morality, but also by a thousand reminiscences: condemned to torture each other, and through scarcely intelligible trifles in looks and words to make each other's life a hell. That is the burden of "Modern Love," and we may suppose that Meredith met with similar sad experiences in his own marriage. He and his wife had strongly distinctive individualities; both were intelligent and both were temperamental. Mutual friction was unavoidable, especially as the nerves of both were constantly frayed by the tension of unfortunate pecuniary and domestic circumstances. Meredith expressed himself once on the

GEORGE MEREDITH

subject: "*Modern Love*, as a dissection of the sentimental passion of these days, could only be apprehended by the few who would read it many times. I have not looked for it to succeed. Why did I write it?—Who can account for pressure?" (L., 156, 1864). His sad personal experience did not poison his views about women; he sought their friendship and society up to the last days of his life, as we may see from the charming letters which he wrote to Janet Ross between 1857 and 1863, as well as from his later correspondence with Lady Ulrica Duncombe. A letter of 1862 shows how much he longed for a harmonious marriage: for a comrade at his side through life. "The Lord decreed to him (Jessop) a helpmate. I say Tuck! Does praying get us wives of this sort?" (L., 85). It was his happy destiny at last to find such a helpmate and life-comrade. A man like Meredith, who set up for himself and his fellow-men such a high standard morally and intellectually, could have found no satisfaction in free love or temporary associations. His second wife, Marie Vulliamy, was his true comrade for many years; what he sought for in his union with her he sets forth in all his novels as the ideal aim of married life; it is expressed in a letter to A. Jessop in June, 1864, announcing his engagement: "He (your friend, i.e., Meredith) loves a woman as he never yet loved. . . . My friends, who know of this, think me fortunate, on reflection. They see that I shall now first live; that I shall work as I have never yet done; . . . I know that I can work in an altogether different fashion, and that with a wife and such a wife by my side, I shall taste some of the holiness of this mortal world and be new-risen in it" (L., 146, 1864). How worthily and impressively he always handles these questions may be seen from a letter which he wrote to Captain Maxse about the

## INTRODUCTORY

latter's love attachment (L., 38), and from letters (54 ff.) "to a friend engaged to be married." A passage from his last novel proves that he remained true to this conviction: "There is the humiliating point of our human condition. We must have beside us and close beside us the woman we have learned to respect; supposing ourselves lucky enough to have found her. . . . We get no balance without her. That is apparently the positive law; and by reason of men's wretched enslavement, it is the dance to dissolution when we have not honourable union with women." His temperament, his experience, his moral outlook, his acute intelligence, led him to say with Dr. Middleton: "Plain sense upon the marriage question is my demand upon man and woman, for the stopping of many a tragedy" (E., 520); led him also consciously to become the mouthpiece of the cause, and not to regard it as waste of time to use his art for writing about love; because "the trials of life are in it, but in a narrower ring and a fierier. You may learn to know yourself through love, as you do after years of life, whether you are fit to lift them that are about you, or whether you are but a cheat, and a load on the backs of your fellows. The impure perishes, the inefficient languishes, the moderate comes to its autumn of decay—these are of the kinds which aim at satisfaction to die of it soon or late. The love that survives has strangled craving; it lives because it lives to nourish and succour like the heavens" (H.R., 546).

## MEREDITH'S INTENTIONS

### (a) *Poet or Reformer?*

How, then, has Meredith handled his material? Is he primarily an artist, or is he above all a reformer, perhaps

even a dogmatic writer? Does he, like Nietzsche, leave us in doubt about the category in which we should place him? Is it a teacher or a poet, who speaks to us here about love and marriage, about oppressed women and human progress? When we hear the battle-cries about women's rights, marriage reform and modern education, we may well feel some hesitation about Meredith's claims as an artist. But fortunately his novels remain free from taint of morbid realism or indeed from pedagogy, owing to his Celtic temperament, his rich fancy and his sense of humour. Whenever we direct our thoughts specially to Meredith's ideas of reform, we are not able for a moment to lose sight of the fact that a poet is looking at these things; breathing life and warmth into dry materials. Certainly he conceives it as the aim and object of the novel to deliver a message to mankind, and Mrs. M. Sturge Henderson is, no doubt, right when she says: "Intermittently, Meredith is a great artist; primarily and consistently, he is a moralist, a teacher."<sup>1</sup> Meredith is certainly no simple-minded poet like Schiller; his works are marked throughout by a spirit of reflection; they contain a moral, and he consciously comes forward as the prophet of definite ideas, enriching his novels and poems with his philosophy, with which he expects to exert a reforming influence on mankind. That story and philosophy should go hand-in-hand is for him an indispensable requirement. Without philosophy, by which Meredith means without an intellectual outlook, the novelist's art would, in his opinion, degenerate to a presentation of sentimental trifles, rose-pink and dirty drab. "If we do not speedily embrace Philosophy in fiction, the Art is doomed to extinction" (D.C., 17). Meredith sees that feelings and emotions must give place to intellect, and

<sup>1</sup> May Sturge Henderson, *G.M., Novelist, Poet, Reformer*, p. 2.

#### INTRODUCTORY

the novel can only fulfil its destiny when it is filled "with the fires of positive brainstuff" (D.C., 16). He offers us a stronger nourishment than we have been accustomed to get from the professors of the sentimental novel: "You must feed on something. Matter that is not nourishing to brains can help to constitute nothing but the bodies which are pitched on rubbish heaps. Brainstuff is not lean stuff; the brainstuff of fiction is internal history, and to suppose it dull is the profoundest of errors" (D.C., 15). We therefore expect from Meredith a dominating idea, a *Leitmotif*. His novels may be classed as cultural, but not tendentious; for the latter his ethics are too little dogmatic and his philosophy is too unsystematic. He may be a critic of social evils, but practical reforms are not put in the foreground. "L'artiste est doublé d'un moraliste," but not *vice versa*.

Meredith gives expression to this in a letter: "Close knowledge of our fellows, discernment of the laws of existence, these lead to great civilisation. I have supposed that the novel, exposing and illustrating the natural history of man, may help us to such sustaining roadside gifts. But I have never started on a novel to pursue the theory it developed. The dominant idea in my mind took up the characters and the story midway" (L., 398). It is not so much that he wishes to overthrow or improve existing establishments and laws, his purpose is to kindle the intellect to activity. He has one broad, general purpose in view: to promote the growth and progress of mankind, and his problems develop quite naturally from this endeavour. He has a vision of new values, created by way of evolution rather than by revolution. But his critical gifts are balanced by his poetical genius, and it is the latter which breathes life into his characters and ideas. "We were told long ago," says Garnet Smith in his essay, "that there is a

#### GEORGE MEREDITH

constant feud between the philosopher and the poet, the moralist and the artist." In Meredith's case such a view must be repudiated, for his work is a conscious synthesis of art and philosophy. He unites remarkable gifts of philosophical criticism and analysis with poetic inspiration and imaginative genius. Life in its rich variety, the faults and virtues of men and women, the mysterious workings of the human heart, offer him a broad canvas for his fancy and psychical intuition. He may be a reformer, but always within the borders of his artistic plan. He is much too seriously a psychologist, symbolist and poet to become a tendentious writer. He is never led by love of sensation, but always by the true creative impulse of an artist. His novels are on the one hand profound and their contents have a value which is found in few other works of the kind, but on the other hand, as Garnet Smith has remarked, it is fortunate for Meredith, the artist, that the moralist in him does not always get the upper hand, and we come to the final conclusion that, although Meredith was deliberately a meliorist, "his genius lies in poetic greatness of design rather than in intellectual analysis." In spite of some stylistic and technical faults he has created works of the highest artistic power and passion, and his novels fulfil the ideal which he expressed in these words: "Honourable will fiction then appear; honourable, a fount of life, an aid to life, quick with our blood" (D.C., 13).

In the circle of Meredith's great contemporaries Browning comes nearest to him in presenting a similar synthesis of art and ethics, poet and reformer. Browning's art is also didactic, but never sententious; it is philosophical and rich in problems, but never inartistic. With him as with Meredith the form often suffers through the wealth and profundity of his material, whereby both poets acquired a

#### INTRODUCTORY

reputation for obscurity. In no other contemporary author, except perhaps Carlyle (who, however, was more a prophet than a thinker), do we see such a wrestling of the artist with his materials, as in these two outstandingly intellectual poets. They always remain artists, even when their reforming zeal is set in the balance over against their poetic impulsion, and sometimes actually weighs it down. They differ clearly from natures like Tennyson and Swinburne, in whom the thought is subordinated to love of form, melody, rhythm, so much so that we find a severe critic speaking of a "maximum of sound" with a "minimum of sense." We may cite George Eliot as a novelist in whom the qualities of a thinker are combined with a fine poetic instinct; but she lacked the courage of her convictions, and did not venture to develop her theories, fearing the anathema of the British public; she therefore fell a victim to convention and must be placed far below Meredith, with whom otherwise she has much in common in the acuteness of her psychological analysis and her preoccupation with modern scientific systems. We wish to do justice to both sides of Meredithian inspiration, and not like Chesterton to criticise only the intellectual, educational side of Meredith's art. "His philosophy may be barren, but he is not," is Chesterton's judgment. He has no interest for Meredith's problems, and for that reason condemns their discussion in literature, pro or con. He sees other origins for the troubles and anxieties of the Victorian age, and so he dismisses offhand Meredith's reforming impulse: "This conscious and theorizing Meredith did not get very near his problem and is certainly miles away from ours. But the other Meredith was a creator; which means a god." However, it is my object to show with what success Meredith grasped the true nature of his problems and

#### GEORGE MEREDITH

followed them through to a conclusion. For Chesterton, Meredith's "mere intellectualism about women" signified only that "the most brilliant brains can sometimes get tired" and his views were just "chivalrous pronouncements on behalf of oppressed females"; as propositions they had no importance whatever. How contradictory the critics are in their estimation of this poet-reformer another judgment will show. James Douglas condemns Meredith because he, like all novelists, spoke his mind with too much hesitation. "He might have cut more deeply into the carcass of life, if he had been writing in German or French or Russian or Norwegian, but he never forgets the gaunt spectre of Philistine convention behind him, moderating, diluting and controlling his thought."<sup>1</sup> But we ought to be thankful that a great poet should turn his attention at all to these problems, and present them to us so much more attractively than the prosy sociologists are wont to do. There is more truth, on the contrary, in what Photiadès says: "Ainsi, les poètes chassent Meredith chez les prosateurs; les romanciers, à leur tour, le renvoient chez les poètes, et ceux-ci, finalement, le livrent aux philosophes." There are some, perhaps, like the impressionist George Moore, who will not tolerate at any price the combination of art with ethics, and reject Meredith altogether, but even those who are opposed to his conception of the purpose of his art must in the end acknowledge his genius. A writer of such a totally different stamp as Oscar Wilde was obliged to pay his tribute of merited admiration to the greatness of Meredith, so that we may forget the few words in which he indulged his gift for banter: "Meredith! Who can define him? His style is chaos illuminated by flashes of

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Hammerton, p. 349.

## INTRODUCTORY

lightning. As a writer he has mastered everything except language: as a novelist he can do everything, except tell a story: as an artist he is everything except articulate. . . . But whatever he is, he is not a realist. Or rather I would say that he is a child of realism who is not on speaking terms with his father. By deliberate choice he has made himself a romanticist. He has refused to bow the knee to Baal, and after all, even if the man's fine spirit did not revolt against the noisy assertions of realism, his style would be quite sufficient of itself to keep life at a respectful distance. By its means he has planted round his garden a hedge full of thorns, and red with wonderful roses."

### *(b) Realist or Romanticist?*

Wilde's comparison of our author's romantic and realistic tendencies leads us to another remarkable feature of Meredith's genius. When Bernhard Fehr calls Meredith's work a synthesis of romantic and realistic art, or of logic and phantasy, his aphorism comes nearest to the nature of the Meredithian novel. There may be many who stigmatise this combination as unfortunate, but it represents the intention of the author as he himself conceived his vocation. In a letter of 1864 he speaks of this: "Between realism and idealism there is no natural conflict. This completes that. Realism is the basis of good composition" (L., 156). Again, he thinks that great men like Shakespeare, Goethe, Molière, Cervantes, are genuine realists—but, "they have the broad arms of Idealism at command. . . . I hold a man who gives a plain wall of fact higher in esteem than one who is constantly shuffling the clouds and dealing with airy, delicate sentimentalities, headless and tailless

GEORGE MEREDITH

imaginings." Therefore he does not disdain to choose problems of everyday life as material for his compositions—naked, bitter truths and facts, for he loves the earth and embraces it. The artist takes his material from the earth and re-fashions it: "I admit that we can re-fashion; but of earth must be the material" (L., 156). It is this conception which distinguishes his work so radically from the contemporary melodramatic socialism of writers like Dickens, but permits much closer comparison with Fielding, and then again with a group of later writers at the end of the nineteenth century. With bold realism he pictures the existing social evils, and, without recourse to sentimentalism looks "plain facts" in the face, illuminating them with his poetic fancy. He is the deadly enemy of every kind of sentiment, of this "depraved sentimentalism of our drawing-rooms" (L., 165). Meredith looks at men and things with intelligence, and good English common sense; the *Comic Spirit* is his serviceable henchman in his campaign against those who parade their feelings, emotions and narrow-minded conventions, but cannot think clearly or take responsibility. And his lucidity is crowned with a nimbus of romance, which conjures up for us the image of his charming and magnificent women, his poetical love scenes, and beautiful descriptions of nature. But Meredith's respect for "flesh and blood reality" does not go so far that he feels himself obliged to scavenge among the filth and dregs of life, or to pander to erotic tastes. In such concerns he is always the reserved, cool Englishman, without ever appearing prudish. Course, realistic, narrative disgusted him: "I have gone through the horrible book of Mendès, with the sensation of passing down the *ventre de Paris*. . . . Nigh the end of it, Zola seemed to me a very haven, Maupassant a garden. . . . It is the

#### INTRODUCTORY

monsterization of Zolaism. O what a nocturient, cacaturient crew has issued of the lens of the Sun of the mind on the lower facts of life!—on sheer Realism, breeder at best of the dung fly! Yet has that Realism been a corrective of the more corruptingly vapourous with its tickling hints at sensuality" (L., 401, 1887). In the same way he wished to guard himself from any kind of morbid tendencies. He is a born psychologist, who feels the danger of being led astray, and he must confess: "much of my strength lies in painting morbid emotion and exceptional positions; but my conscience will not let me waste my time" (L., 171). And that is why we find in all his novels, on the one hand the most subtle delineation of mental processes, and on the other hand a healthy outlook on life, a wholesome conception of the relations between men and women. What he gives us is above all "inside information"; we are to learn the inner condition of his people. "Exposition of feelings" is more important than the narrative, even at the risk of holding up progress. He always has before his eyes the fact that his subject is difficult and delicate: He knows that the subtle charm of intimate human relations may be destroyed by a hint of vulgarity. "L'Amour ought not to be dissected," he says, when speaking of Stendhal's book, "and indeed can't be. For when we've killed it with this object, the spirit flies, and then where is L'Amour?" (L., 57). Yet he is conscious of affinities with the author of *L'Essai sur L'Amour*: "Still I think Stendhal very subtle and observant. He goes over ground that I know" (L., 57).

## ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS WITH REGARD TO THE RELATIONS OF THE SEXES

### I THE EPOCH OF THE CONVENTIONS

#### STARTING POINT: THE POSITION OF WOMEN

THE focus on which Meredith fastens his attention is the relation of the sexes to each other, and when he took upon himself this great task, he was well aware that our knowledge is but fragmentary, and that it is especially in the intercourse between men and women that there are spiritual imponderables, which cannot be expressed in words: "But no literary surgeon or chemist shall explain positively the cause of the behaviour of men and women in their relations together" (A.M., 151). And again: "It's only a large and a close and a pretty long study of them [women] that can teach you anything; and you must get rid of the poetry about them, and be sure you haven't lost it altogether" (O.A., 55). Meredith himself completely fulfilled this condition, and he is in the truest and best sense of the word a champion of women. He sang a noble song of their beauty and intelligence, but he also looked at them critically and coolly; he searched their hearts like a conscientious physician, so that when once he had recognised the malady which hindered their growth, he might become their truest helper and adviser. His criticism of society begins with the woman; she is the focus of his attention, and her liberation from social conventions is his primary concern.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

He is the first novelist who completely frees himself from the accepted idea of the so-called feminine woman, this "parasite" and "slave" of society. His poetic fancy makes the dry theories of Comte, Mill and Spencer glow with animation. He creates characters and imparts a reality to the causes for which they strive, so that we are drawn with heart and soul to feel and know what till then only our reasoning powers have been able to approve. What he says about feminine capacities, feminine education, training and business abilities, is as advanced as any modern expression of women's aptitudes. We meet his type of women even in his early novels, and after the publication of *Sandra Belloni* the heroines of his novels lose all traces of their relationship with the "pretty idiot" or the "passive beauty" of the romantic and sentimental novel. His modern feminine characters become ever riper and more animated, until they receive their full expression in the last four novels in the persons of Diana, Nesta, Aminta and Carinthia. As we look at the spectacle unfolded before our imagination we have a fellow feeling for Meredith's women who escape from the narrowness of conventional ideas, learn to think independently and establish their claim to personal freedom. This development cannot take place without inner and outward conflicts; it is particularly in love and marriage, those closest of all relationships between man and woman, that we feel the shock of natures clashing, and any suppression of one's personality makes itself most intensely and unpleasantly noticeable. Innumerable causes of friction may be present, and it is no wonder that the problem and the laws of marriage occupy the foreground in Meredith's novels. The theme is already announced in *The Egoist*, and recognised side by side with the subject of egoism as a second *Leitmotiv*; but it is in the last four

GEORGE MEREDITH

novels that it becomes the central theme. *Sandra Belloni* and *Victoria*, also present women characters of the true Meredithian type; in *Sandra Belloni*, especially, the absurdity is exposed of the old sentimentalism and the conventions of society. *The Tragic Comedians* is important because it throws a light on the wreck of a passionate romance through the faults and weakness of both the lovers.

Looked at from the sociological point of view, Meredith presents two stages in the development of relations between men and women: first the primitive condition, in which the man is a hunter pursuing his quarry, satisfying his instinct for the chase and conquest. We have not yet emerged from this condition, but must contend against it with all our might, because it is the enemy of cultural progress. Woman is still too dependent on her husband, and is expected to mould her character according to his wish. With the freedom of the wife from this servile relationship we enter a new arena: this change, which Meredith so ardently desired, is the forward step, through which we become aware of a new conception of conduct in the union of the sexes. Comradeship now enters to take the place of the old battle; love and marriage assume an essentially different character. While love was formerly only a means to an end, serving almost exclusively the object of preserving the race, it is now an ultimate end in itself, whereby man and wife are to win joy and strength for the journey through life, and so contribute mutually to the perfecting of their personalities. But to emerge from the primitive condition; to become a conscious torch-bearer, involves a complete conversion, and convention stands in the way as the bitterest enemy of this change, and a hindrance to all progress. Especially in affairs of love is convention unyielding, lest the structure of the accepted manner of life, erected with

## ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

so much patient care, should be endangered, and yet this structure stands on the weak foundations of false sentimentality, moral cowardice and hypocritical prudery. Meredith, however, boldly tears the veil from these things, exposes the falsehood of the old romantic conventions and gives us a picture of the ruthless conflict between the sexes, which, though it is ever finding more subtle expression, loses none of its inherent barbarity, and approaches no nearer to a true understanding. He is a vehement accuser of the brutal man, who, in his opinion, is responsible for the shameful relations between the sexes, and who has thereby caused so much harm to humanity, branding it with his depravity and making woman his creature, his slave, instead of his comrade and equal. The average man still behaves as a brute towards women, is still governed by his lusts and instincts.

### THE EGOIST

#### (a) *The Primitive Egoist*

In all Meredith's novels we are introduced to this primitive type in pursuit of his quarry. We see it more or less disguised, but it is just the most distinguished and the most polished men who are inwardly the most rapacious and brutal. Their purpose is not only to satisfy their physical desires, but to pursue to excess their aesthetical demands. According to the principle that all is fair in love and war, they are unscrupulous in clearing every obstacle out of their path. "How brutal men can be!" (D.C., 43) is an utterance forced all too soon from the lips of the beautiful Diana. "The pristine male" is, like his hoary ancestors, excited by opposition; his "passion for his

GEORGE MEREDITH

charmer" expresses itself first and foremost in the impulse "to pull down the standard of the sex, by a bully imposition of sheer physical ascendancy, whenever he sees it flying with an air of gallant independence." And, in fact, it is only by his greater physical strength that he succeeds. Later in the story of Diana we meet with a similar expression, when it is said of Dacier that he was free of "the common masculine craze to scale fortresses for the sake of lowering flags" (D.C., 279). All types of the woman hunter are represented in Meredith's novels, from the rake to the sensual, sentimental weakling, and then again the accomplished libertine: men like Lord Mountfalcon (O.R.F.), who has no scruples when he tries his seductions upon the innocent, newly-married Lucy, taking advantage, with cool calculation, of her loneliness; or Worrell in O.O.C., who "belonged to the male birds of the upper air, who mangle what female prey they are forbidden to devour" (O.O.C., 325). Morsfield (O.A.) indeed feels sympathy with Aminta's sad condition, but does not shrink from compromising her reputation, and is unscrupulous in his methods of winning her: "meant not worse than to pull his lady through a mire, and wash her with Morsfield soap, and crown her, and worship" (O.A., 272); for "the women he trampled on; the men he despised" (O.A., 259). He was the genuine "intemperate lover, of the ancient pattern. He was devoted to our sex, we must admit, after the style of the bears. They are for honey, and they have a hug." Sir Lukin Dunstane can never resist a beautiful woman; his chief delights are wine and "the alliterative cognate theme" (D.C., 60); he cannot even control his passions out of respect for the friend of his wife, and drives Diana by his amorous attentions out of the house. Adrian Harley (O.R.F.) is another of the type; he sins secretly, while

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

outwardly posing with perfect success as a cynic, concealing his moral infirmities under a cloak of brilliant wit. Even an intellectual character so distinguished as Alvan (T.C.) is but a beautiful wild beast towards women. They are for him "nine-pins destined to fall . . . objects to be chased, the politician's relaxation, taken like the sportsman's business, with keen relish both for the pursuit and the prey, and a view of the termination of his pastime" (T.C., 108). His former comrade and friend is ruthlessly cast aside, to make way for the young and beautiful rival, this coquette with the golden hair, who awakens in him the instincts of a conqueror, and whose possession flatters his masculine vanity. Such a quarry is worthy of the pursuit; obstacles only excite a keener relish. Blind in his love, absorbed in his self-assertive obstinacy, determined to win his loved one in the good old-fashioned way, this social rebel defies all obstacles, all conventional prejudices and customs, and finally expiates his unworthy passion with his death.

##### *(b) The Polished Egoist*

Far more pernicious than the primitive egoist is the more refined variety. Nietzsche says somewhere: "O, that you had even the perfections of the animals! For animals have at least the virtue of innocence." One thinks of this when comparing a man like Lord Fleetwood (A.M.) with Alvan, whose instincts, though primitive, were at any rate generous. Nietzsche has another word for men like Fleetwood: "Their souls are plastered with slime, and woe be it when there is a blend of intelligence with the slime!" Fleetwood belongs to the most dangerous of his kind: of all Meredith's men he is inwardly the most complicated; the delineation of his character is a masterpiece of psychological analysis.

GEORGE MEREDITH

And he, too, has the "brute" in him; he tries to tame the bold spirit of a girl like Carinthia; he is not merely a "lady-killer"; he is a "woman-eater" (A.M., 21). "His pride was in it as well as his taste, and when men are like that, indeed they are devourers!" (A.M., 21). A sensitive, æsthetic and sharp self-observer, he can never quite forget his "ego," can never give himself up without reserve to a good impulse. His is not merely the primitive joy of wooing and winning, as we saw it revealed in Alvan; he will not only pursue and possess, but also exquisitely devour. Carinthia as a Griselda, loving blindly, trusting, and obeying, is distasteful to this man and offends him, because he must first conquer in order to be able to enjoy. He is not indifferent to the charm of her unselfish, devoted love, but even this cannot prevail against his wounded vanity. As soon as this awkward and reserved young woman of the mountains blossoms into a courageous, clever and handsome woman, his desires become inflamed. Her pathetic dependence on him, her uncomplaining love, provoke him only to contempt and ignominy; but when at last she rejects him, the brutal side of this voluptuary is awakened: "his inherited keen old relish for our inter-sexual strife and the indubitable victory of the stronger, with the prospect of slavish charms, fawning submission, marrowy spoil. Or perhaps, preferably, a sullen submission, reluctant charms; far more marrowy" (A.M., 395). The egoism of this husband is not exhausted in his lust for pursuit and possession; for the organic structure of the modern egoist is finer and therewith more pretentious. Fleetwood's vanity and pride debar all possibility of reconciliation with Carinthia. "Had he been free of the dread of subjection, he would have sunk to kiss the feet of the statuesque young woman" (A.M., 375). This man, who

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

thinks that his money is all-powerful, is at bottom a bondsman to public opinion and afraid of it. He is always thinking of himself and the effect of his conduct upon his social circle; he therefore hates Carinthia, who has made him ridiculous. As the genuine sentimental he has no feeling of responsibility, and thinks that with the outward fulfilment of his pledged word he has discharged all claims upon him. It is true that by marrying Carinthia he redeems his promise, but he takes no further account of her and leaves her to her fate: he "struck off his fetters and escaped from importunities" (A.M., 146). But Carinthia is not an ordinary type; she has charms which fascinate him; he knows the value of her physical and intellectual attractions, because they are rare among the women of his circle. These charms bewitch his senses; he is resolved at all costs to gratify his desires, and tries a further approach to her. He seeks his pleasure without giving a thought to the responsibilities which he will thereby incur: "finally, the taste to meet her sprouted. If agreeable, she could be wooed; if barely agreeable, tormented; if disagreeable, left as before" (A.M., 347). In these lines we see Fleetwood's naked egoism revealed; it stifles every nobler impulse, and leaves him no field in which his good qualities can develop. He fools away the possibility of an active and happy existence by the side of Carinthia, whom he has learned too late to love and respect. His existence in the circle of his "Ixionides," the flatterers and worshippers of his wealth, has now become repulsive to him, and he throws himself into the arms of Catholicism, hoping in a cloister to find the peace of mind, which, however, can only spring from himself, by learning to subdue his own egoism. A predecessor of Fleetwood is the weakling Edward of *Rhoda Fleming*; except that he is a rather more conventional type,

GEORGE MEREDITH

with the traditional features of the deceiver who, after satisfying his desires, heartlessly forsakes his victim. Like most of his kind, he forgets that women have spiritual beauty surpassing all physical attractions. When Dahlia becomes a burden to him he does not shrink from contriving her marriage with a rascal. As another genuine sentimentalist he fears more than anything the ridicule of his friends, which his union with a farmer's daughter might evoke. The heartlessness of his inner feelings culminates in a letter which he wrote to her (Rh. F., 184); it is outwardly sweet and kind, but carefully avoids all reference to her mental anguish. His insight and contrition come too late; he turns once more to Dahlia, but the spark of love in her is for ever quenched, and she dies after seven years of peaceful shelter in her sister's home. Edward is by nature affable and kind, well educated and right-minded—far superior to his good-for-nothing cousin Algernon, but morally (or immorally) he is a slave to social conventions. At first he had despised the superficial and dishonourable attitude of his class, among whom unscrupulous ill-treatment of girls from a lower class was deemed permissible. But now, when he is faced with the predicament, in which he must either do his duty to Dahlia by marrying her, or save his position in society and his fortune, he thinks it madness to act upon his former honourable feelings. And he is not alone in this; it is the typical attitude of society; he is just a product of his surroundings. Wilfrid (S.B.) and Dacier (D.C.) are like Edward; they cannot release themselves from the sentimental egoism of their set, although there are noble and attractive elements in their characters. "Wilfrid was young, and under the dominion of his senses; which can be, if the sentimentalists will believe me, as tyrannous and misleading when super-refined as when

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

ultra-bestial" (S.B., 91). Wilfrid loves Sandra, and is roused so far as to declare love to her and promise marriage, for, indeed, the impulsive, unspoilt young maiden had really appealed to him. But when he is reminded that this child of nature offends against the "Fine Shades," he is shocked and turns his attention to the cool, distinguished Lady Charlotte. Wilfrid, the egoistic woman-hunter, would certainly like to possess Sandra, though he is too cowardly to acknowledge it publicly. But, "if she grows famous, whispered coxcombry, why then oneself will take a little of the praises given to her" (S.B., 144). In his egoism he expects Sandra "to shine forth as an ideal," instead of giving himself up to her charming personality and musical gifts. He belongs to the type of men who are half dead and who get what they deserve: "they are unaware of any guilt that may be charged against them, though they know that they do not embrace Life" (S.B., 240). What is the use of all the physical courage which this Cornet certainly has in full measure, when his moral qualities are so utterly undeveloped? He suffers less from the results of his selfish conduct than the victim of his sentimentalism. In her anguish after her lover's deception Sandra loses her voice, and she is only rescued from death by her good angel, Merthyr Powys, her friend, admirer and educator. Hence the warning: "you should make the best provision you can against the cowardice of men."

In *Diana of the Crossways* Meredith stigmatizes Dacier's behaviour as vulgar egoism. Most readers would probably like to defend him against this reproach, or at least to plead extenuating circumstances; for how could it occur to such an even-tempered, honourable man to excuse Diana's betrayal of his secret as the effect of an emotional storm? But if we can understand his condemnation of the woman,

GEORGE MEREDITH

whom nevertheless he loves so dearly; apart altogether from that he appears to us to be warped by conventional prepossessions. With the brutal instinct of self-preservation he casts off Diana, who has sacrificed for him her reputation and her fortune: he feels not the slightest compunction in leaving her in order that he may seek for outer and inner peace in a marriage of convenience. "Honourable, courteous, kindly gentleman, highly civilised, an excellent citizen and a patriot; he was icy at an outrage to his principles, and in the dominion of Love a sultan of the bow-string and chopper period, sovereignly endowed to stretch a finger for the scimitared Mesrour to make the erring woman head and trunk with one blow: and away those remnants" (D.C., 329). Lord Ormont (O.A.) and Victor Radnor (O.O.C.) are also to be numbered among the egoists, but it will be more convenient to analyse their characters in a later chapter on the subject of marriage.

In Meredith's most famous book, *The Egoist*, we meet the classic example in both senses: the primitive woman hunter and the refined voluptuary. Meredith gives us here the most acute analysis of masculine egoism; again and again we are amazed to find that even insignificant details of this commonest of all human weaknesses do not escape the notice of the great psychologist. As Eugen Frey has already said, there are three themes in *The Egoist*: one is the characteristic egoism of the modern aristocrat; secondly human egoism in general; and thirdly the question as to whether a betrothal once entered upon is irrevocable. Here we shall concern ourselves only with the male egoist in his behaviour to women; the question of the betrothal will be dealt with in a later chapter. For this shrewd study of the subject we may accord Meredith the first place among modern psychological novelists. Never before in English

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

literature has egoism been so thoroughly exposed, so painfully dissected. In many novels we meet with egoists in love, but we do not find much more than the simple emotions of the average man who woos and wins his lady-love. We must go back to the *Misanthrope* of Meredith's great predecessor, Molière, to find a masterpiece worthy of comparison. Willoughby, "this petrifaction of egoism" (E., 98), as Clara calls him, is the type of a perfect English country gentleman. If outwardly he beams like Lucifer, he is inwardly so much the more pitiful. His attitude to women from the first is that of the primitive lordling. He is the sun around which they rotate; they are only there as satellites to show forth his might and glory. In spite of the Aristotelian observance of the Unities in this novel, we get a few stray hints of the experimental knowledge which he had collected, before he returned to settle down on his property and discharge his duty to posterity by means of a suitable marriage. But his experiences in the metropolis had left him in doubt as to whether a marriage would really satisfy him. Would he not be happier unattached? For he loved his freedom: "he was princelier free; he had more subjects, more slaves; he ruled arrogantly in the world of women; he was more himself" (E., 17). Moreover, there is the question whether a wife will submit to being securely chained in marriage. That he can only possess one woman is a torment to the egoist; he would like to dominate them all, and if a beautiful woman shows favour to another man he feels it as a personal injury. "He was of a vast embrace" (E., 137). He likes to pursue the beautiful creatures, but his conceit is never satisfied. Stronger than his instinct for conquest is his wish for full, undivided possession of the object desired. He has the general characteristic to which Meredith alludes

later in a letter to Lady Ulrica Duncombe: "Even young women have but a confused idea of the masculine sentiment of complete possession, down to absorption . . . and how it is to pursue them anticipatorily and retrospectively" (L., 531, 1902). He is one of those men, who, according to Diana's famous epigram, "have rounded Seraglio Point: they have not yet doubled Cape Turk" (D.C., 8). But even if he were a Mohammedan he could not possess all the women, and he would still be unsatisfied. It would be best then, after all, to bind to himself in marriage a woman, who would be disposed to make herself a "nest" for him. It goes without saying that this woman must be one of the most beautiful and most coveted. After the superb Constantia Durham had found him out in time and had broken her engagement, Willoughby tries to fasten his chains on Clara Middleton. She was a star for whom all men were astronomers, but he had driven every rival from the field, a fact which flattered his vanity in no small degree. He is a magnificent person and fortune, he is sure, will bless him in his wife; he is therefore proud of his choice. But instead of finding endless pleasure in Clara's youth, her beauty and intelligence, he can only take her as a captive. He will not merely satisfy his lower nature, but must also possess her soul entirely. Under no circumstances can he tolerate difference of opinion; it is a self-evident condition that she must always be in harmony with him. It was not long before Clara plainly saw: "she was a captured woman, of whom it is absolutely expected that she must submit" (E., 58). She must give up thinking for herself, and it must be a pleasure to her always to be led by her husband. But that is not enough: she must not only love, but worship: "she was expected to worship him and uphold him for whatsoever he might be, without any estimation of

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

qualities" (E., 108). She is to love him so exclusively that he does not even like it when she shows esteem for other men besides himself: "which is waste of substance properly belonging to him" (E., 125). The world is not to divert her from the object of her worship, and so he preaches to her the *égoisme à deux* in its worst expression: "he explained to his darling that lovers of necessity do loathe the world" (E., 45); and again: "but does not love shun the world? Two that love must have their substance in isolation" (E., 64). To which Clara aptly replies: "No; they will be eating themselves up." In his jealousy, pride and vanity, he wishes, like Hebbel's Herod, to be her sole possessor beyond the grave, and therefore tries to bind Clara by an oath to remain true to him after death: "Consent, gratify me; swear it. Say, 'Beyond death.'" Nothing is so interesting to him as his own ego, and so he imagines, too, that Clara will listen full of interest to the long-winded descriptions of his state of mind and feelings. These things he unfolds to her with the sole desire of exciting her admiration, but they are only his trivial self-reflections, and the simple consequence is that she sees in him the man without a heart: "an obelisk, lettered all over with hieroglyphics, which it is his great delight to interpret." But Clara is fortunately not the woman to turn herself into ashes or incense for his sake, or in the full sense of the phrase to become the man that she marries. Willoughby notices with horror and incredible astonishment that she is all the time slipping away from him. "The capricious creature probably wanted a whipping to bring her to the understanding of the principle called mastery, which is man!" His self-love forbids him to believe that he, society's darling, could be detestable to a woman. He suspects at once a rival in the person of his

GEORGE MEREDITH

sparkling Irish friend De Craye, whose schemes he is determined to frustrate. If he cannot himself keep the beautiful flower, he must at least see that no other man shall have the gratification. "Ten thousand furies thickened about him at a thought of her lying by the roadside without his having crushed all bloom and odour of her which might tempt even the curiosity of the fiend, man." And so he sets his heart on giving her to Vernon, because he thinks there can be no greater degradation for her than to become the second wife of his erratic cousin; "she must be given up to an extinguisher" (E., 397). Meredith himself treats his hero to the silvery laughter of the Comic Spirit; although he deserves a harsher fate, we see him only as a comic, sometimes almost tragic figure. For if both Constantia and Clara are lucky enough to escape him, he finds a victim at last in the gracious, romantic, sentimental Laetitia. For years he has been her fairy prince, and this devotion has in time become indispensable to him. Her poems, her veneration, are tinsel decorations and encourage his self-confidence. The author finds it tragical, that while the coquettes do not win the best husbands (a statement which might be disputed), it is just the best wives who fall victims to the egoists: "women on whose devoted constancy they feed, they drink it like blood" (E., 182). Willoughby trifles with Laetitia's love as a cat plays with a mouse. Time after time he allows her to think that he will make her his wife, and thus heartlessly awakens hope which he does not intend to fulfil. When Constantia left him he returned to Laetitia, but only in order to convey the impression that he had given up Constantia for Laetitia's sake. Having secured the desired effect he forsakes her again. When he came back from his three years' travels, the first person to meet him was Laetitia,

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

and again he practises his brutality. He must make sure that she has remained true to him, not in order that he may at last lead her to the altar (how could the magnificent Willoughby be content with such a meek violet?) No, he is just gratifying his vanity. "He read deeply in her eyes. He found the man he sought there, squeezed him passionately, and let her go" (E., 25). And then, when he makes the promised visit to her father—which surely can have but one meaning—it is only to discuss business, and Laetitia must bury her hopes once more. Finally, when Willoughby realises that Clara has given him up, Laetitia comes to the surface again, and this time it is serious, for she alone can save him from the shame of the twice-rejected lover. It vexes him to think that his future wife no longer possesses all the charms of youth—she has suffered too much—but she will understand and venerate him, and be constant to him as a fixed star. That would be a choice marriage: "It would be marriage with a shining mirror, a choric echo" (E., 389). The quintessence of his egoism is consummated in the thought, that his agony can be terminated by the possession of a faithful wife: "a tried, steadfast woman is the one jewel of the sex. She points to her husband like the sunflower; her love illuminates him; she lives in him, for him; she testifies to his worth; she drags the world to his feet; she leads the chorus of his praises; she justifies him in his own esteem" (E., 388). Laetitia becomes his wife, but with no illusions; she has at last the right measure of her former hero in pitiful exposure before her eyes. Willoughby the magnificent, the adored, is now content to take a wife who marries him for practical advantages, and he is only too thankful that, from whatever motives, she does finally, after he has long pleaded with her, consent to become his wife. This sorry conclusion may seem rather

#### GEORGE MEREDITH

unnatural, for *Vanity Fair* is, alas, a market where a man like Willoughby could still buy beautiful wares; but the tragic-comedy of the final issue is irresistible: over the unmerciful exposure to all the world of this hero, so much admired, the conclusion sheds a gleam of kindly humour. We should all of us search our hearts and drive out this evil spirit of egoism, which in its deadliest form haunts love's domains. In a famous passage of *The Egoist* we read: "The love-season is the carnival of egoism, and it brings the touchstone to our natures. I speak of love, not the mask, and not the flutings upon the theme of love, but of the passion; a flame having, like our mortality, death in it as well as life, that may or may not be lasting. Applied to Sir Willoughby, as to thousands of civilised males, the touchstone found him requiring to be dealt with by his betrothed as an original savage" (E., 110).

#### THE INFERIORITY OF WOMEN

Just as the hegemony of a savage race would doom all culture to extinction, so the misuse by man of his power over the weaker sex must mean loss and ruin to human society as a whole. When women are artificially held back in such a low stage of development, they are useless and unprofitable members of the commonwealth. Meredith blames the man for woman's inferiority, for he has left her no freedom of movement by which she may become independent: "she cannot move without him; she is the marble block, and if she is to have a feature, he is the sculptor" (D.C., 335). She cannot develop her humanity to perfection, because she is not free, and so she degenerates like all bondsmen. Meredith is a defender of women and

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

directs against the men a weighty accusation. They are responsible because they will have women so. Women are dependent on them and must strive to please them, for women even to-day are not much better than slaves sold in the market. He does not hesitate to designate them as market wares; it is hard, but true: "young women educated for the market" (O.O.C., 245); and because the supply of marriageable women is greater than the demand, they must use every art to drive their rivals out of the field. They are so trained by their mothers, and Meredith describes this, for example, in the case of Clare's mother (O.R.F.); she sinks to depths of abasement in the hope of capturing Richard. Just as the merchant studies the wishes of his customers, so must the woman, who wishes to be marketable, suit herself to the requirements of the man, or abandon the competition. But the woman's character suffers thereby, in the same way as the work of an artist is impaired when, for profit's sake, he makes concessions to public taste. She sinks to inferiority when she adapts herself to the wishes of a world ruled by men, whose object it is to prevent her development to independence. The subservient wife in the lower classes is almost completely a slave to house work; the position of a better-class wife may be easier and more free from care, but at the best she is only a precious ornament in the eyes of her attentive possessor. Deprived of all natural and spontaneous originality, she is become an artificial product, and has allowed her natural gifts to wither. The proud and beautiful Cecilia Halkett (B.C.) surely had the capacity in her to be the fit comrade for Nevil Beauchamp. She is richly endowed with physical and intellectual gifts; but she cannot make the acknowledgment that she would love to advise and help Nevil, because that would be against her conceptions of womanliness. She

GEORGE MEREDITH

is, therefore, no wife for the progressive and combatant reformer; "she was one of the artificial creatures called women (with the accent) who dare not be spontaneous, and cannot act independently if they would continue to be admirable in the world's eye, and who for that object must remain fixed on shelves like other marketable wares, avoiding motion to avoid shattering or tarnishing. This is their fate only in degree less inhuman than that of Hellenic and Trojan princesses offered up to the Gods, or pretty slaves to the dealers." She is another of the women of whom Janet (H.R., 567) so vivaciously speaks her mind: "who parade and play on their sex, and are for ever acting according to the feminine standard." Meredith is never so happy as when he is exposing these unawakened souls. Again and again he draws comparisons between women and precious but fragile and useless vessels: "statues created by man's common desire to impress upon the sex his possessing pattern of them as domestic decorations" (D.C., 321). How sharp is the judgment upon his own country, in which women are outwardly protected from contamination with vulgar reality, but for that reason are nothing more than "ornaments of their country, glory of a country prizes ornaments higher than qualities" (O.O.C., 383)! We can understand Meredith's disdain for these beautiful but useless créatures. He does not withhold his admiration for their beauty, but he is vexed when he sees such perfect bodies housing tiny brains. It is only at the end of the century that the "new woman" entered public life in England; the modern woman whose type we find in Meredith's novels; whom he helped to bring into existence: for whose aspirations he has shown such tireless activity: the woman who is capable of contributing her share to human progress, and whose influence

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

is noticeable in the improvement of social conditions, and the alleviation of many of the hardships of war. These women are gaining daily more influence upon human conduct, but the leadership of a society queen is illusory; in reality she is but a costly ornament.

In *Diana of the Crossways* Constance Asper is the best example of this over-refined, cold feminine type. She was ideally suited to the cool English aristocrat Dacier, for whom the spiritual depth and the passionate temperament of the Irish Diana must always have remained strange and uncomfortable. Diana's captivating beauty, her intellect and her good sense could perhaps fascinate him for a time, but even apart from her unfortunate slip, a breach between them must have come sooner or later. In spite of his gifts as a statesman, he is a philistine, who cannot throw off his national and narrow-minded moral prejudices. His love collapses pitifully, and he finds a worthy partner in Constance. "He had the English taste for red and white, and for cold outlines: he secretly admired a statuesque demeanour with a statue's eyes. The national approbation of a reserved haughtiness in woman, a tempered disdain in her slightly lifted small upperlip and drooped eyelids, was shared by him; and Constance Asper, if not exactly aristocratic by birth, stood well for that aristocratic insular type, which seems to promise the husband of it a casket of all the trusty virtues, as well as the security of frigidity in the casket. Such was Dacier's native taste" (D.C., 196).

Refinement is the password and the first qualification expected of a woman; the requirement is one to which everyone would subscribe when culture of the mind and body go hand in hand. What Meredith censures is the "gilded refinement" (S.B., 29), which the handsome officer Wilfrid admires so much. "The female flower

GEORGE MEREDITH

could not be too exquisitely cultivated to satisfy him" (S.B., 29), for "in his soul he adored the extreme refinement of woman, even up to the edge of inanity . . . the image of elegant dames in their chosen attitudes—the queenly moments when perhaps they enter an assembly, or pour out tea with an exquisite exhibition of arm, or recline upon a couch, commanding homage of the world of little men" (S.B., 163). Meredith loves his women and there are few authors who can draw their charms so well as he; but his intention is to exhibit the contrast between the cold, passive type and the active, sparkling, impulsive women, who are not content to be mere puppets. Sandra Belloni is very much unlike the English ideal of the good *Cornet Wilfrid*, just as *Carinthia* is far superior to her beautiful sister-in-law *Henrietta*, and *Diana* to her rival *Constance*. How much more attractive is the freshness of *Clara Middleton*, that "dainty rogue in porcelain," than the meek submission of *Laetitia*! But such spirited women are distasteful to men: they prefer the statuesque type, the idol, that they can worship or crush as the mood suits them, whose beauty they may use to enhance their own magnificence, without contracting obligations. "Fair Circassians," Meredith calls them (D.C., 3), who are silent and leave conversation to the men. They can only be distinguished from their oriental sisters by the absence of the *yashmak*. What, then, are the feminine characteristics which the primitive man so highly values; which attract a man like *Dacier* to *Constance*, and which are indispensable to men like *Wilfrid*, *Willoughby* and *Fleetwood*? The first condition, says Meredith, is that the man shall have command. That can only be when the women behave with meekness and submission, and with this end in view they must be preserved as far as possible from experience of real life.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

Meredith has placed many of his apt and subtle observations in the mouth of the clever Diana, and in one of her shrewd and famous remarks she says: "We women are the verbs passive of the alliance, we have to learn, and if we take to activity with the best intentions, we conjugate a frightful disturbance. We are to run on lines like the steam-trains or we come to no station, dash to fragments." But Diana does not belong to these women; she is not quiet and patient when she suffers injustice; in political conversations she does not remain dumb, she has disturbing and unwomanly tendencies to take part in them. For a man of the average type to associate with her can only bring vexation and disappointment. Only a man like Redworth, who is tolerant and will not submit to the tyrannies of convention, can understand a woman like Diana and make her happy.

Lady Wathin, Constance Asper's friend, and the bitter enemy of Diana, is typical of the narrow-minded philistine in society, when she breaks out against women with intelligence. A young wife like Lady Dunstane ought at least to have the modesty to suppress her superior mental faculties. "Brains in women she both dreaded and detested; she believed them to be devilish. . . . Women with brains, moreover, are all heartless: they have no pity for distress. Brains in men advance a household to station; but brains in women divide it and are the wrecking of society" (D.C., 340). Women like Lady Dunstane are too clever. How different they are from the conventional ideal so delightfully sketched in O.O.C., 297! "Indeed a beauty; with round red cheeks and rounded open eyes, and a demure shut mouth, a puppet's divine ignorance; inoffensive in the highest degree, rightly worshipped."

Meredith looks deeper than those who maintain that

GEORGE MEREDITH

heart and feelings are the real domain of women. Women to-day come in contact with crude reality, and it is an insult to their intelligence, when husbands expect no more from them than the devotion of emotional hearts. Many a tragic fate awaits women through this excess of devotion, which only too often meets with no response. What field of activity is open to women who are educated to feel but not to think? "They may be withering virgins, may be childless matrons, may be unhusbanded wives. Wandering in the vast realm which they are exhorted to call their own, for the additional attractiveness it gives them, an unsatisfied heart of woman will somewhat audaciously cross the borderland a single step into the public road of the vast realm of thinking. Once there, and but a single step on the road, she is a rebel against man's law for her sex" (O.A., 107). To the egoist, indeed, it is inconceivable that women could be serious about wanting to change things. Could they be so mad as to renounce the courtly, gallant and knightly prerogatives which give them so great an advantage, "as they are to think" (O.O.C., 195). Meredith cannot too severely censure this gallantry, which must hurt the feelings of every truly honourable and independent woman. Esteem and consideration, combined with a real willingness to help, are useful and pleasant in our mutual relations; but this false chivalry, proffered to the weaker sex, is a travesty of knightly virtue. Britons put good manners before everything, and gallantry is a quality for which they are remarkable, though among their American cousins it takes on most unhealthy forms of feminism. The Briton is proud of his correct behaviour in love and marriage, and in these matters he is inclined to brand other nations as barbaric; but he forgets that his outward demeanour is often but a cover for emptiness and intellectual poverty; while the

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

rougher moods of the middle European do not detract from the warmth and sincerity of his family life. Women need not fear to renounce those "priceless privileges of petticoats" (O.O.C., 195), as Meredith in mockery calls them, and the warning of their brothers, that the appeal for equality will rob them of such prerogatives, need no longer frighten them. The "chivalrous breeched" may protest against "the shocking emancipated grisly female," but women will go forward on their way, and Meredith has shown us in his brave modern women that they can do it without loss of dignity and true womanliness.

When to-day still so many women are found sadly incapable of clear logical thinking, no man has the right to complain, because it is his work. Again and again Meredith accuses the men: you have planned this ignorance and now you are reaping the harvest. "Total ignorance being their pledge of purity to men, women have to expunge the writing of their perceptives on the tablets of the brain: they have to know not when they do know. The instinct of seeking to know, crossed by the task of blotting knowledge out, creates that conflict of the natural with the artificial creature to which their ultimately-revealed double-face, complained of by ever-dissatisfied men, is owing. . . . Jeer at them as little for not showing growth. You have reared them to this pitch, and at this pitch they have partly civilised you. Supposing you to want it wholly, you must yield just as many points in your requisitions as are needed to let the wits of young women reap their due harvest and be of good use to their souls. You will then have a fair battle, a braver, with better results" (E., 206). Man's first requirement of the woman is divine ignorance—in order to make it easier for him to govern and deceive, and then as a guarantee for perfect purity and virginity of

GEORGE MEREDITH

body and soul: "the angelical beauty of a virgin mind" (D.C.). He and he alone will be her lord; she shall not see the world with her own eyes, but receive her impressions from him. Meredith sees barbaric origins in this absurd demand for ignorance: "the sensual stipulation, for perfect bloom, silver purity, which is redolent of the Oriental origin of the love-passion of their lords" (E., 39). Sir Willoughby Patterne is a "despotic prince" (E., 18), and it is painful for him to see how his chosen one is accessible to her many wooers and stained by the dust of the world. "He wishes for her to have come to him out of an egg-shell, somewhat more astonished at things than a chicken, but as completely enclosed before he tapped the shell, and seeing him with her sex's eyes first of all men" (E., 18). He was bitterly disappointed in Constantia Durham, who did not exactly belong to the class of women "who retire in vapours, downcast, as by convention; ladies most flattering to the egoistical gentleman, for they proclaim him the first" (E., 109). Constantia is not the true ideal for men like Willoughby: "pure possible; it is not so easy to say innocent; decidedly not our feminine ideal. Miss Middleton was different: she was the true ideal, fresh-gathered morning fruit in a basket, warranted by her bloom" (E., 53). Once again we have the old comparison with market wares: "without their purity what are they!—what are fruiterers' plums?—Unsaleable. O for the bloom on them!" (E., 137). They must be unspotted: "at a whisper of the world he shut the prude's door on them with a slam; himself would have branded them with the letters in the hue of fire" (E., 109).

When women try to fulfil this demand for angelic innocence, it only breeds in them habits of gross hypocrisy. Sooner or later they must see things, and then they feel

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

obliged to pose as unenlightened, or they adopt man's attitude and exact from their sisters the same mute agreement. Woe, then, to the woman who offends this hallowed convention! Meredith has vividly pictured the unseemly intolerance of women, which is alas too common, towards their own sisters. The Pole sisters suffer pitiful shipwreck through their love for "nice feelings, fine shades." Too superior to work and relieve the financial anxieties of their father, too timorous and ambitious to marry for love, sentimental in all emotional and sexual things, "they entertained the sentimentalist's abhorrence of the second marriage of a woman, regarding the act as simply execrable, being treason to the ideal of the sex—treason to Woman's purity—treason to the mysterious sentiment which places Woman so high, that when a woman slips, there is no help for it but she must be smashed" (S.B., 276). They, too, would find it unthinkable that a young lady should speak with a man about "the inner holies" (E., 237). They are, in fact, flowers which have been artificially forced, and have lost much of their natural beauty; and Meredith comes to the sorrowful conclusion that "not many men are trained to courage; young women are trained to cowardice" (E., 248), and must therefore succumb in the struggle for existence. The lovely Renée, one of Meredith's most charming women characters, must pass her life in a detestable marriage of convenience, because she, too, is a victim of a rotten mode of viewing things. She is not the comrade that a man like Nevil needs, not "his equal in passion and courage" (B.C., 68).

No novelist before Meredith has thus, without a trace of sentiment, spoken the naked truth about such women. His predecessors could not escape from the poetical idea that man is the natural support for the weaker sex, as the

GEORGE MEREDITH

oak supports the climbing ivy; they could not see that this fair creeper was a parasite. Meredith was the first to break away from the old conventions and compass this union of good sense and courage with tenderness and charm. His women resemble some of Shakespeare's characters, like Portia and Rosalind, through this combination of vigour, grace and common sense. What he asks for in women is a nature strong and constant, and he condemns the man as inconsistent, who wants an effeminate wife and at the same time despises her weakness. Meredith, who was bred in the school of evolution, demands a natural development of women, not an artificial aggregate of contrasting qualities according to the husband's whims. Woman shall no longer be bred to servitude—"the weak thing, the gentle parasite, which the fiction of our civilisation expects her, caressingly and contemptuously, to become in the active, while it is exacted of her—O Comedy of Clowns!—that in the passive she be a rock-fortress impregnable, not to speak of magically encircled. She must also have her feelings; she must not be an unnatural creature. And she must have a sufficient intelligence; for her stupidity does not flatter the possessing man. It is not an organic growth that he desires in his mate, but a happy composition. You see the world which comes of the pair" (O.O.C., 298). The blame lies with the men, but the appeal is made to women to set themselves free. Like Ibsen's Nora, they must liberate themselves from this unworthy dependence on man, from a purely sensual life; they must give up their doll's existence and become, physically and intellectually, competent. Strindberg looks upon women as the evil principle which drags men down; Meredith, with equal force and artistic genius, supports the contrary view, but fortunately without the painful onesidedness of the Swedish

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

author, to whom he is much superior in healthy, logical judgment. "I suppose we women are taken to be the second thought of the Creator," says Diana, "human nature's fringes, mere finishing touches, not a part of the texture, the pretty ornamentation." But for Meredith they are just as important and valuable in the fabric of our life as his own fellow-men. He knows that for the future of mankind their unhindered development is as much needed as man's proficiency. But although since Meredith's days the ideal of the *Puppenfrau* has lost support and attraction, we cannot, on the other hand, claim that Meredith's views have become common property. On this point G. M. Trevelyan says: "This conventional stultification of woman in alleged pursuance of an ideal was more general when Mr. Meredith began to write than it is to-day." Certainly we have made advances, but if we pursue the enquiry we shall find that modern notions still come dangerously near the old ones, of the sewing, knitting housekeeper and the bird in the golden cage. Are, then, these parasite and doll existences the only evil consequences of a man-made world? According to Meredith this is not the worst. Women when repressed are not only inferior, but they actually degenerate; they develop base and evil qualities in the struggle with their lords. They are not by nature evil-minded; it is their servitude that makes them so. "She is a creature of the apparent moods and shifts and tempers only because she is kept in narrow confines, resembling, if you like, a wild cat caged" (O.A., 225). Man has the power, so women become sly and crafty, frivolous and gossipy, and they contrive means for controlling their husbands. The wife invents ingenious tricks to get the upper hand; she must do it in order to make her servile existence supportable. It would not be necessary

for free, independent women to have "recourse to particular arts, feline chiefly, to make their way in the world" (L., 562). The rational Colney Durance, that enemy of "the ninny male's ideal of female innocence" (O.O.C., 245), says excusingly, "as it is a way with young women, with young women educated for the market to be timorous, consequently secretive, rather snaky." These are the qualities which a misguided outlook and conventional education breed in them. They grow inevitably to coquettes.

A standard example of such women is Clotilde von Rüdiger (T.C.). Young and beautiful, she began at an early age to practise her arts, with "a flavour of the Fronde in her conduct"; and now she sighs for the "strong man," who will release her from the tedium of social drifts. She finds him in Alvan, and without making direct attacks she knows very well how to ensnare him through her beauty and an assumed sympathy with his ambitions, so that he becomes convinced that he has at last found a congenial spirit and a comrade in life. But she is playing a shabby double part, not so much through cunning as through weakness. She loves Alvan, but cannot on the other hand do without her devoted worshipper, Prince Marko Romaris. Instead of rising to Alvan's spiritual heights, for which she no doubt had the talent, she drags him down to her, and this love becomes his ruin. "She has him by the worst half of him. . . . She will not keep him to his labours to consolidate the power. She will pervert the æsthetic in him through her hold on his material nature, his vanity, his luxuriousness" (T.C., 193). She is drawn to Alvan by sensual and emotional feelings, but in his struggle to win her, her courage fails, and she is responsible for her lover's death. Meredith, indeed, can find extenuating

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

circumstances for this woman, but taken altogether she possesses just those qualities which he condemns. She is timid, submissive, coquettish, and withal cold and heartless: "She's icy. She has no passion. She acts up to him when they're together and that deceives him" (T.C., 194).

#### THE CONSEQUENCES OF THESE CONDITIONS FOR SOCIETY

What, then, can we expect from a people who are so strongly prepossessed with conventions? The influence of the individual on the ethical level of such a society must be frankly depressing. We cannot expect any high and worthy aims from a community which still receives its laws from men of primitive type. The impulse to "go with the crowd" gathers power through sheer weight of numbers, condemning every "social rebel" to martyrdom. Where the subservient woman and the primitive man wield the power there can be no progress, no spiritual freedom. Most lurid are the evil consequences to be seen in the direct relations of the sexes. Unhappy marriages, marriages of convenience, one-sided morality; all these things are the consequences of defective social standards. Only a modern writer, so impressed with the significance of the latest scientific researches that he could conceive the necessity for a more healthy moral basis of society, could treat these abuses so seriously and fight so energetically for their removal. His interest was first aroused by the teachings of the positivists, and then stimulated by his own reflections and experiences and by a well-developed sense of fairness. He belongs to the little band of leading spirits, who saw the afflictions of society and attacked them. How long will it

GEORGE MEREDITH

be before their ideas become the common inheritance of the people—how long will it be before their demands will be accepted as the incontestable responsibility of the generation and of those who shall come after?

(a) *Unhappy Marriages—Marriages of Convenience*

The love of Alvan and Clotilde was shattered, because they lived in a stage of culture which was still too primitive; and so it is often our experience that marriage and a life's enjoyment are destroyed through the immaturity of our thought and feeling. The interest of Meredith's novels is not to be found in the old themes of infidelity, seduction, unhappy love affairs, sweet romances; not in tracing the progress of some personal story, but in the attitude of his people to life: their ethical standards are his chief concern. If they are still in the grip of primitive conceptions, he brands them as unfit. Men like Lord Ormont and Alvan, women like Nataly and Lucy, in spite of many attractive qualities, are shipwrecked on life's voyage. They are slaves of convention and therefore become victims of the saddest complications. Egoism in the husband, and the inferior status to which the wife is condemned, are the cause of much misery in their union. Both parties enter on marriage with false expectations; the husband looks for sensual enjoyment and cannot recognise mental endowments in his wife. He knows only the physical side of love, has generally, in fact, pretty thoroughly explored it before his marriage. Women, he believes, are created to attract the men: it can serve no purpose for them to have intellectual gifts: "a thing rather distasteful in women or chilling to the masculine temperament" (O.A., 393). It is no wonder that a

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

chaste, untaught maiden loses all her illusions, when she finds that she has married a monster instead of a protector. "The revelation to a fair-minded young woman of the majority of men being naught other than men, and some of the friendliest of men betraying confidence under the excuse of temptation, is one of the shocks to simplicity which leave her the alternative of misanthropy or philosophy" (D.C., 98).

Both parties suffer bitterly under these conditions. The weak Nataly reproaches herself justly for having been too submissive to the man she loved; she "had been slave not helper. She had given him her life, little aid. . . . Sensible of capacity, she confessed to the having been morally subdued, physically as well; swept onward" (O.O.C., 257). Their union need not have been tragic, in spite of social ostracism, if she had possessed the courage and the independence to take the lead in the problems which were tearing their hearts. There was no real spiritual union between them: their happiness was wrecked as much by Victor's too "manly" temperament as by her conventional "womanliness." In marriage the man can be as much disappointed as his wife, when she is untaught and therefore so inferior to her husband that they can be no true companions. They do not understand each other and drift apart in a marriage hallowed by convention and therefore indissoluble. Light-minded natures, like the pretty Mrs. Blathenoy or the coquettish Lady Grace, can defy the conventions, and thereby too often cause great unhappiness; but serious natures like Aminta, Diana and Carinthia, and among the men, Vernon Whitford (E.) and Austin Wentworth (O.R.F.) are torn in mind when they have to make the weighty decision between a breach of the conventions or lifelong misery. How much worse are the

conditions in a marriage of convenience, one of the most tragic effects of the dependence and ignorance of young girls! Meredith has given us a pathetic description of the misery of such a marriage in the sufferings of the lovely Renée. She was too weak to oppose the will of her father and social conventions. She had no idea of the misery in store for her. Nevil could have saved her; in manliness and determination no one could equal him, but he was too young and inexperienced: "he committed the capital fault of treating her as his equal in passion and courage" (B.C., 68).

(b) *One-sided Morality—Demi-monde*

When Meredith attacks the fundamental evil of one-sided morality, it is for him pre-eminently a question of justice, rather than a sexual problem. He is as usual the champion of the woman, and enters the field as her defender. It is the woman who has been deceived, or has gone astray, to whom he directs his sympathy; to whom help and not contempt is due. He is not so much concerned with the question, whether the man in this connection should for natural reasons be measured by a different standard: he would be the last to stand up against a law of nature. What shocks him is the cruelty and injustice of men towards the victims of their misdeeds. For this he finds no judgment too severe: "when men get women on the slope to their perdition, they have no mercy, none. They deceive, and they lie; they are false in acts and words; they do as much as murder. They're never hanged for it. They make the laws! And then they become fathers of families, and point the finger at the wretched creatures. They have a dozen names against women, for one at themselves" (O.O.C., 286).

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

The essential evil is man's hypocrisy: while guilty himself, he delivers up his guilty partner to the judgment of society. In those days the sexual problem did not occupy so much public attention as in later times when it was given an exaggerated importance in life and art. The works of people like H. Ellis, Forel and Ellen Key belong to a later generation. Meredith certainly did not under-estimate the importance of the senses in human thought and conduct, and the discernment of that clever psychologist Lady Charlotte Eglett is no doubt his own: "Sex she saw at play everywhere, dogging the conduct of affairs, directing them at times; she saw it as the animation of nature, senselessly stigmatized, hypocritically concealed, active in our thoughts where not in our deeds" (O.A., 54). It seems to Meredith monstrous that a man should demand spotless purity from his wife, in order that his rights of paternity may be safeguarded and that he may have peace of mind when he is away from home, while he himself is free in this connection to gratify his desires—and why? Simply because he is a man. We may all be as strongly in favour of the demand for chastity in the wife, but, on the other hand, it is the most mischievous deceit and cruelty, when society unanimously casts out a poor mishandled creature, while the reputation and honour of the man remain untainted. What Meredith denounces is "the particular satyr-world which, whatever the nature or station of the woman, crowns the desecrator, and bestows the title of Fool on the worshipper" (D.C., 316). He is not content with the usual "grimly melancholy shrug over the cruelties resulting—cruelties chiefly affecting women" (O.A., 54). He is free from that kind of prudery, which passes over such conditions in silence, or runs away in horror when they are discussed. Young people are anxiously guarded from contact with this

GEORGE MEREDITH

sort of thing, and books on the subject are "banned by self-respecting readers" (O.O.C.). If the egoism of men prevents them from putting an end to these conditions, it is the duty of women to rise up against them. What bitterness is in the souls of those women, who, having stooped to folly, are denied every possibility of recovery! "The kindest of men can be cruel, and will forget their Christianity toward offending and repentant women" (Rh.F., 8). Certainly there are bad women as well as bad men, but the men have the power and they make use of it, "and then they turn round and execrate us for not having what they have robbed us of!" (O.O.C., 287). That is the well-merited accusation with which the unhappy Judith Marsett upbraids the men. Women like Nesta and her radical French governess are not afraid to stand up for their unfortunate sisters. When Nesta's eyes are opened to things of this kind, her first impulse is to help, because her disposition has not yet been perverted. Society forbids young ladies "to have cognizance with women leading disorderly lives." Nesta is not turned back because society is horrified, she remains bravely by the side of the despised Judith to comfort her by kindly words and deeds. Meredith treats this delicate question with a frankness astonishing for English readers, so that it is a matter for surprise, that this novel, which was already "immoral" enough on account of Victor Radnor's unsanctioned union with Nataly, aroused so little protest. The fact is that not many persevered with the reading of it: the style presents so many difficulties. Meredith asks from women sympathy with their sex, and from men fairness. "Women should feel for their sex," says Nesta, "they should not allow the names; they should go among their unhappier sisters! I am sure, that fallen cannot mean—Christ shows it does not. He changes the

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

tone of Scripture. The women who are made outcasts, must be hopeless and go to utter ruin. We should, if we pretend to be better, step between them and that. . . . You speak to me of my innocence. What it is worth, if it is only a picture and does no work to help to rescue. . . . I have a French friend—she will never marry until she meets a man who has the respect for women, for all women. We both think we cannot separate ourselves from our sisters. She seems to me to wither men, when she speaks of their injustice, their snares to mislead and their cruelty when they have succeeded. She is right, it is the—brute: there is no other word" (O.O.C., 287). What is needed is genuine, practical help, not a kind of false sentimentality, which the man is generally ready to bestow, that is "when he is not hungry" (O.R.F., 337). But Meredith finds no expression too strong for the man who turns against the victim of his desires after he has tired of the association: "men who consent to hear black words pitched at them, and help to set good women facing away from them, are pious dolts or rascal dogs of hypocrites" (O.O.C., 381). Already in an earlier novel, *Rhoda Fleming*, Meredith handled the subject of the "fallen" girl: a novel in which, indeed, we discern strong resemblances with Richardson's *Clarissa Harlowe*; and yet it seems to be much more than a century later: the treatment is so modern; even when compared with the work of Meredith's contemporaries. *Rhoda Fleming* gives us, in a way, the conventional story—the innocent, inexperienced Dahlia—her aristocratic seducer Edward—her puritanical and narrow-minded father. And Dahlia's sister, Rhoda, is hard and unrelenting: her maidenly pride is roused by the disgrace which her sister has brought upon the family. Dahlia's father, too, is like Meister Anton in Hebbel's *Maria Magdalena*, concerned to

GEORGE MEREDITH

blot out the shame, even if it means buying a husband for Dahlia at a cost which must break her heart. Father and daughter have the traditional outlook and visit Dahlia's sin with Old Testament severity: " 'my first girl—she's brought disgrace on this house. She's got a mother in heaven, and that mother's got to blush for her. My first girl's gone to harlotry in London.' . . . It was scriptural severity of speech " (Rh.F., 102). And the position taken up by Edward and his circle indicates just as clearly the ancestral notions of his class. Before he himself became involved in these matters he was sentimental enough to dream of chivalry and honour towards women: " he had despised the young men as brainless cowards in regard to their views of women and conduct toward them " (Rh.F., 123). But he is no sooner guilty himself than he tries to dispose of his responsibility by the soothing arguments of the sentimental egoist: " and it's true that gentlemen are situated—they can't always, or think they can't, behave quite like honest men " (Rh.F., 326). He would like to behave respectably and kindly, but the egoist in him revolts: " how can I utterly dash my prospects in the world? " And while the contest between good and evil rages in his heart, there comes the beautiful widow, Mrs. Lovell—and with her, of course, the circle of his privileged class—they are all agreed that it is better for a man to deceive and ruin a maid than to risk his future career. Meredith invites not only sympathy but respect for such unhappy girls: " the young man who can look on them we call fallen women with a noble eye, is to my mind he that is nobly begotten of the race and likeliest to be sire of a noble line. Robert was less than he; but Dahlia's aspect helped him to his rightful manliness. He saw that her worth survived. . . . All these false sensations peculiar to men, concerning the

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

soiled purity of woman, the lost innocence, the brand of shame upon her, which are commonly the foul sentimentalism of such as can be too eager in the chase of corruption when the occasion suits, and are another side of prurience, not absolutely foreign to the best of us in our youth—all passed away from him in Dahlia's presence" (Rh.F., 264). Edward found out too late that Dahlia's moral worth had not suffered by her surrender: that she was still fit to be the comrade of a good husband. This novel then is not without progressive ideas, which already point to the courageous themes of the later novels like O.A. and O.O.C., dealing with the conflicts between love and convention; natural rights and human law. Dahlia resembles the charming but weak Renée; they are the classical examples of the conventional, inexperienced women, whose happiness is wrecked because they know too little of life.

And who is to blame? First and foremost the man, whose egoism is the root of all the evil; and next the woman herself, because she is too compliant; and thirdly society, because it tolerates a one-sided morality, and guards with Argus eyes the stability of its artificial standards. It has learnt the art of safeguarding the old traditions and set its face against every innovation. "The more I know of the world the more clearly I perceive that its top and bottom sin is cowardice, physically and morally alike" (D.C., 175).

We can only hope for laws more righteous and humane, when people are more civilised: "but before society can be civilised it has to be debarbarized" (D.C., 175). It is still a society in which culture is superficial; a society in which the real gentleman is the exception: the man who buys a wife, ruins her and plays the tyrant, is the rule. Class prejudice and hypocrisy are the order of the day. Through

GEORGE MEREDITH

the dissoluteness of the husband on the one hand and the demand from the wife on the other hand of a virtuousness which becomes wearisome, prostitution and the courtesan class have entrenched themselves in society: "where the Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett were innumerable, threatening to become a majority; as they will constantly do while the sisterhood of the chaste are wattled in formalism and throned in sourness" (D.C., 354). Meredith is a kind and sympathetic judge of women like Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett and Bella in O.R.F., though he has no doubts about their pernicious influence. With all his tolerance he is, as we shall see later, a sworn enemy of the "wild oats" theory and women of this kind he regards as unwanted parasites. In one passage we read that "Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett had then become the blazing regnant anti-social star; a distresser of domesticity, the magnetic attraction in the spirituous flames of that wild snap-dragon bowl, called the Upper Class" (D.C., 370). Bella Mount "could read men with one quiver of her half-closed eye-lashes. She could catch the coming mood in a man, and fit herself to it. What does a woman want with ideas, who can do thus much? Keenness of perception, conformity, delicacy of handling, these be all the qualities necessary to parasites" (O.R.F., 360).

"Women," says Meredith, "have us back to the conditions of primitive man, or they shoot us higher than the topmost star. But it is as we please. Let them tell us what we are to them: for us, they are our back and front of life: the poet's Lesbia, the poet's Beatrice; ours is the choice. . . . They are to us what we hold of best or worst within. By their state is our civilisation judged: and if it is hugely animal still, that is because primitive men abound and will have their pasture" (E., 232).

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

It seems a dismal picture: this sketch of weak, primitive men and women. Nevil Beauchamp loses his patience with the type: "these women who have not moved on their own feet one step since the primeval mother taught them to suckle, are perpetually pulling us backward on the march" (B.C., 517). But the author is too optimistic to give up hope. Evolution shows that progress is possible, and the rewards will be there if intelligent men and women will lead us forward.

When there are more men like Nevil Beauchamp the women will not be condemned to lead such useless lives. "The devouring male Egoist prefers them as inanimate overwrought polished pure-metal precious vessels, fresh from the hands of the artificer, for him to walk away with hugging, call all his own, drink of, and fill and drink of, and forget that he stole them" (E., 111). But women will awaken; they will abjure this unnatural standard and make themselves free. "The capacious strong in soul among women will ultimately detect an infinite grossness in the demand for purity infinite, spotless bloom. Earlier or later they will see they have been victims of the singular Egoist, have worn a mask of ignorance to be named innocent, have turned themselves into market produce for his delight, and have really abandoned the commodity in ministering to the lust for it, suffered themselves to be dragged ages back in playing upon the fleshly innocence of happy accident to gratify his jealous greed of possession, when it should have been their task to set the soul above the fairest fortune, and the gift of strength in women beyond ornamental whiteness. Are they not of a nature warriors like men?—men's mates to bear them heroes instead of puppets?" (E., 110).

## II THE NEW IDEAL

### THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN

In order to lift society, and in particular the relations of men and women to each other, to a higher level of morality and culture, the work of reform must begin with women: until we give women a different intellectual and moral education, they cannot take their proper position in society. Meredith did not believe with Rousseau that women are by nature morally and intellectually inferior to men, and he, therefore, thought it possible, by a more rational education, to bring them on to be instruments of culture in the same degree as men. Since Mary Wollstonecraft took up the cause it has continued to attract public interest, but any sort of systematic education of girls can only be said to have begun after the middle of the nineteenth century, when the increasing population and the surplus of women necessitated the consideration of professions for them. Under the direction of the humanitarians, people like F. Denison Maurice, Harriet Martineau, Spencer, J. Stuart Mill, and many others, reforms were introduced, and so much was done that at the end of the century the same higher education was open to women as to men. But the long battle which had to be fought, before public indifference and prejudice could be overcome, is reflected in the literature of the period, in which the "new woman" becomes ever more frequently the subject of consideration. Yet Meredith's clever women are far ahead, in character and personality, of the blue-stockings that we meet with in the books of Mrs. Humphry

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

Ward, Sarah Grand and others. He tolerates no descent into conventional sentimentality, and for that reason his women characters are all the more solid and robust.

He has a genius and imagination which give brilliancy and colour to his women; their struggle for existence in its cruder forms is not his concern; he creates a *milieu* in which he can show them beautiful, many-sided, clever and fashionable, for he will have nothing to do with the gloomy realism of novelists like Gissing. But he overlooks none of the requirements for a modern education, and we may say that his women characters are in the widest sense of the word cultivated.

##### (a) *Home and Parents*

What then are Meredith's more particular views about the education of women? We must begin in the nursery with the "puling things" (O.A., 36), in order that they may be fresh and strong like "the lustier male child." How can a child become proficient when it is always kept in leading strings? "Women are in the position of inferiors. They are hardly out of the nursery when a lassoo is round their necks" (E., 100). Meredith detests the old educational ideal of unconditional obedience; he demands, even for girls, freedom and scope for growth to independence. The sheltering of girls, the restrictions upon their freedom and enlightenment, are anathema to him. His outlook has something in common with the American educational movement, with which he had perhaps some sympathy, if we may so interpret an expression about Victor Radnor's daughter; "Nesta's Arcadian independence likened her somewhat in manner to the Transatlantic version of the English girl" (O.O.C., 122). Then follows a description of her qualities, which assuredly reflects Meredith's ideals: "Her high

physical animation and the burden of themes it plucked for delivery carried her flowing over impediments of virginal self-consciousness, to set her at her ease in the talk with men; she had not gone through the various Nursery exercises in dissimulation; she had no appearance of praying forgiveness of men for the original sin of being woman; and no tricks of lips or lids, or traitor scarlet on the cheeks, or assumptions of the frigid mask, or indicated reserve-cajoleries. Neither ignorantly nor advisedly did she play on these or other bewitching strings of her sex, after the fashion of the stamped innocents, who are the boast of Englishmen and matrons, and thrill societies with their winsome ingenuousness" (O.O.C., 122).

It seems a wonder that Nesta should have grown up so fresh and free, for her parents, by their unsanctioned union, had placed themselves outside the pale, and yet in the matter of education chose "the conventional system with this exceptional young daughter" (O.O.C., 129). For her father in particular the education of girls was a hidden mystery: "he had not an idea upon the right education of the young of the sex." For him, too, the principle of education is to keep his child in sweet ignorance and maidenly simplicity. There must be "repression of the mystery" as long as possible, while avoiding the danger of allowing her, through her innocence, to happen upon a misadventure. For "how beautiful is the shining simplicity of our dear young English girls!" Nataly supports Victor in this, for she longs to see her daughter accepted in the society from which she is excluded for having affronted its conventions. The men of this society demand before all things the virtue of ignorance from their future wives: "Assuredly a Dudley would be immensely startled to find in his bride a young woman more than bably aware of the

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

existence of one particular form of naughtiness on earth" (O.O.C., 125). But Dahlia's sad fate shows that this ignorance can indeed bring a young girl to disaster, and the sorrowful acknowledgment is forced upon her own sister "It's ignorance that leads to the unhappiness of girls."

It was Nesta Radnor's good fortune to have among the friends of her parents clever and progressive comrades and teachers. Colney Durance, Dartrey Fenellan, and her French companion Charlotte, the champion of women's rights—they all helped to mould this so richly gifted love child into a splendid woman. It is Colney Durance's method; the method of this bachelor, theorist, satirist, which Nataly rejects, but which our author wholeheartedly approves: "since, as he argued, we cannot keep the poisonous matter out, mothers should prepare and strengthen young women for the encounter with it, by lifting the veil, baring the world, giving them knowledge to arm them for the fight they have to sustain; and thereby preserve them further from the spiritual collapse which follows the nursing of a false ideal of our life in youth" (O.O.C., 124). The women ought to throw off this false prudery and begin to think naturally about natural things. They ought to look straight into the facts of life—even those sad ones—and try, hand in hand with men, to help. Meredith, with all his love for France, was obliged to give a glance in passing at the education of French girls. So long as girls have to be brought up in ignorance, he is bound to approve the watchful attention of the mother, who guards her daughter so anxiously from disagreeable experiences. So long as we have "foolish innocence" on the part of the girls and "the predatory" on the other side, strict watchfulness is necessary: "and one would think the French mother

worthy of the crown of wisdom if she were not so scrupulously provident in excluding love from the calculations in behalf of her girl" (T.C., 5). Touching this it is said to Victor Radnor's credit: "he broke from his fellows in his holy horror of a father's running counter to love" (O.O.C., 125), while Renée's father insists upon unconditional submission. "Her education fixed her to the religious duty of obeying and pleasing her father" (B.C., 57). And again: "'What says Renée?' 'She obeys.' 'Exactly. You see! Our girls are chess-pieces until they're married'" (B.C., 57). That is the romantic spirit, compared with which the English appears to be more progressive. Meredith wishes his women to be freed from the restraint of this conventional education; till now they have had to go through life with bandaged eyes, "society's hard-drilled soldiery, Prussians that must both march and think in step" (E., 78). The parents do not yet know how to educate their children rightly, and much unhappiness will follow "until English girls have wiser mothers" (L., 529, 1902).

(b) *Co-Education*

In England it is the custom to send the children of the better classes to boarding schools; Meredith, therefore, is chiefly concerned with the question of finding the best organisation for such institutions. As an example we have the international boarding school which Matthew Weyburn founded (O.A.). But his ideal is the co-education of boys and girls, which promises to give the best results. The idea had already been put forward by Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau and Herbert Spencer, and actually put into practice by the Society of Friends. Its appeal to a man like Meredith was obvious. "You meet now and

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

then," he says, "men who have the woman in them without being womanized; they are the pick of men. And the choicest women are those who yield not a feather of their womanliness for some amount of manlike strength . . . man's brain, woman's heart" (T.C., 100). He believes that co-education will help to realise this ideal. In O.A. we find Meredith's views on co-education more specifically set out: "the secretary proposed the education and collocation of boys and girls in one group, never separated, declaring it the only way for them to learn to know and to respect one another. They were to learn together, play together, have matches together, as a scheme for stopping the mischief between them" (O.A., 151). Lord Ormont and Lady Charlotte are a little sceptical about stopping the mischief, and perhaps rightly so. Meredith takes up the cause again in his old age: "no young woman knows what she gives her hand to; she will never be wiser until boys and girls are brought up and educated together" (L., 531, 1902). "Where the sexes are separated, men and women grow, as the Portuguese call it, *affaimados* of one another, famine stricken" (E. on C., 56); but thrown together they get a better and more healthy opinion of each other. "Subterranean" thoughts do not then arouse unsatisfied inquisitiveness. Then youths and men will learn to speak of women—not only their mothers and sisters—with more respect and more knowledge.

##### *(c) Physical and Intellectual Training are Complementary*

Girls should swim, row and tramp the country just as much as the boys whom they envy for it. Then they would not have "to look on at a play they were not allowed even to desire to share. . . . The thought of the difference between

#### GEORGE MEREDITH

themselves and the boys must have been something like the tight band—call it corset—over the chest, trying to lift and stretch for draught of air" (O.A., 17). Clara Middleton was a games companion from childhood; we learn that she was a good walker and could row. Crossjay's account of an early morning bathe draws from her a longing sigh: "We women are nailed to our sex!" (E., 208). If Meredith were alive to-day he would see enough physical training to satisfy him; indeed sometimes it is carried too far.

But it is not only a question of physical training; girls must have opportunities for intellectual development; the horizon of the mind must be extended; they must learn to look and think beyond the narrow circle of the home; they must enter the professions. "After some taste of active life, their minds would enlarge—that is all we want; their hearts are generally sound" (L., 519), and "women of the independent mind are needed for any sensible degree of progress" (L., 562).

#### THE ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE OF WOMEN

Meredith's quick intuition showed him that professions for women must be found, for the widening of their intellectual horizon, for the attainment of economic independence, and to give them a worthier position in society. It is remarkable that he should turn his attention to the economic significance of the women's movement, for his books are generally concerned with the upper classes, who have no need to consider these questions. But his observations on the equality of the sexes would have been incomplete if he had not done so; and he did not fail to realise that the economic independence of women was the only road to political and social equality of the two sexes. So long as women are financially dependent on the men, the women

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

without means can do nothing but "continue their reliance upon their poor attractions" (L., 426). Few women can hold out against it like Nesta's energetic friend, seeking freedom in a profession—how many are tempted by the attractions of a fortune to a loveless marriage; which may mean for a gifted and sensitive woman a life of misery! "Awful thing, marriage to some women! We chain them to that domestic round; most of them haven't the means of independence or a chance of winning it." Many a time Meredith tells us plainly that the women will always be market wares until they have made themselves independent—sometimes with a comic dash, when his men folk shrug their shoulders in sorrowful resignation, feeling that such notions will drive away all the charms of love and beauty. What's to become of illusion and sentiment? But we can see in Diana, and still more in the hard-working Jane Mattock of C.S. that women can be charming even when they follow professions. "Women must take the fate of market-fruit till they earn their own pennies, and then they will regulate the market. It is a tussle for money with them as with us, meaning power. They will do it as little by oratory as they have done by millinery, for their oratory, just like their millinery, appeals to a sentiment and to a weaker and nothing solid comes of a sentiment. Power is built on work" (C.S., 217). Diana above all feels the urgent need of making herself independent by means of a profession. It is not only the need of money that drives her to it; the work gives her inward peace. Full of enthusiasm she takes up novel writing, "becoming the first martyr of the modern woman's cause" (I.C., 99). She sustains with humour and bravery the not too rosy existence of the self-supporting woman. But she is not yet the real type of the modern woman who earns her living, as we

#### GEORGE MEREDITH

meet her in later novelists. Diana's is a weak attempt, which only succeeds through the help of her friend Redworth, to whom she owed the popularity of her first novel. But she is quite aware of the fact that economic and intellectual independence is the only way to freedom. Her old lawyer, Mr. Braddock, assures her that he expects the day to come when women will be encouraged to work at crafts and professions for their independence. "That," she says, "is the secret of the opinion of us at present—our dependency. Give us the means of independence, and we will gain it, and have a turn at judging you, my lords! You shall behold a world reversed" (D.C., 133).

#### WOMEN AND POLITICS

Meredith's pronouncements on the subject of women and politics are to be found for the most part in his letters. When in his old age he had at last become a celebrity, it was the custom to consult him as an oracle on a thousand propositions, and he gave his mind about the burning question of votes for women on more than one occasion, either to the women's societies or to the newspapers, or more often in letters to his friends. But we can also find his views unmistakably expressed in his novels. As a matter of course a man with such a sense of justice, and still more a partisan in women's causes, would not shirk the logical consequence of his argument. If we remember the long battle which the women fought, and how it was only through the Great War that they advanced their political position, we are not surprised but filled with admiration to see how Meredith took up the cause when the movement was still quite young and fiercely opposed. Novels like *Beauchamp's Career*, *Diana* and *One of our Conquerors* leave no one in doubt about his opinions. Nevil Beauchamp appeals to women to

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

educate themselves politically; he does not belong to that class of men who will not speak seriously to women about politics. On the contrary: "men of the lowest class should be educated in forming a political judgment—and women too" (B.C., 94). Diana goes further, she claims the right to political activity, and puts the case for women passionately to her friend, the politician Dacier. But he is the typical supporter of established principles, and this challenge was "the one smart of sounness in her charm as a woman" (D.C., 156). In his eyes a profession, and above all political activity are "unfeminine." But Diana is not discouraged; neither the hatred of conventional women nor the intolerance of society, can hinder "this young woman of fervid mind, a reader of public speeches and speculator on the tides of politics." The opposition, "this irrational obstructiveness," was difficult to overcome, even in Liberal circles: this we can see from a humorous letter which Meredith wrote to the wife of his friend, Leslie Stephen. She had expressed herself against votes for women, and Meredith makes fun of the customary prejudice. "This I have likewise caused to be reported. 'Enough for me that my Leslie should vote, should think.' Beautiful pasture of the Britannic wife! But the world is a moving one that will pass her by" (L., 426). A letter to Mrs. Fletcher, member of the Dorking Women's Liberal Association, begins with these words: "At this present time women need encouragement to look upon affairs of national interest" (L., 557, 1904). And a letter to Miss Wheatcroft leaves us in no doubt about his views. "Women who form associations to discuss political matters, whether for one party or the other, are taking the right road to the polling booth" (I., 596, 1907). He adds a warning: "let them never abandon good manners, not even in the heat of

GEORGE MEREDITH

dissension, or they will lose their best weapon." Then follows a sharp criticism of the times: "at present our civilization is ill-balanced, owing to a state of things affecting women, which they may well call subjection." Here again we have the significant word "subjection," which has gained importance since J. S. Mill wrote "The Subjection of Women." Meredith is such a convinced supporter of women's rights that he can even defend the Suffragettes in a letter which he wrote to *The Times* (L., 588, 1906). He certainly disapproves of their behaviour, but adds: "the intemperateness of which they were guilty held an idea, going some way to excuse them." He is convinced that "the cause for which these imprisoned women are suffering is on its way to be realized. Men have only to improve their knowledge of women, and it will be granted speedily. Sentimental prattle of the mother, the wife, the sister is not needed when we see, as the choicer spirits of men do now see, that women have brains. . . . Woman must have brains to have emerged from so long a bondage." The same interests, the same work and the same standard of education, these are the things which will abolish enmity between men and women, and will make them comrades in endeavour for the good of their country and of mankind.

The future only can tell whether Meredith was right. The political and social innovations in women's education and emancipation are still too recent to allow of a definite judgment. But no one will dispute the fact that individually the women have profited by the changes, now that the eccentricities, which are always liable to attach themselves to a movement, no longer exist. Even the sceptics admit to-day that wisdom and ugliness are not synonymous terms, and that a woman can be both charming and intelligent.

## ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

And as to the "new man," Meredith shows us that real manliness need not express itself in the mastery over women: intelligent men of a progressive age do not need slaves but comrades for their life's companions. In his novels he contrasts the conventional men and women with his chosen type: creatures of flesh and blood; not lay figures, but human; true to themselves in thought and conduct. They embody Meredith's aspirations: they are not only in the front rank but still marching forward.

## LOVE AND MARRIAGE: A NEW CONCEPTION OF MORALITY

Meredith was fully aware that his unswerving fight against

The criers of foregone wisdom, who impose  
Its slough on live conditions,

would bring him face to face with the sacred institution of marriage. Marriage in its present form and love affairs as they have advanced in the course of time are, like the individual man himself, made by Meredith the subject of a close scrutiny, and a new ideal is in broad outline set up. He is not to be numbered with Utopian Radicals like William Morris; he does not, like Edward Carpenter, see the only hope of marriage reform in a social revolution; but he believes it possible to bring about a change within the framework of our existing society, presuming that men and women will become intellectually and morally elevated.

In spite of his respect for established human relations, he sees the problem of love issuing from natural laws and

#### GEORGE MEREDITH

not from human traditions; on which account the prudish English public suspected him quite unjustifiably of immoral tendencies. His conception of morality is more enlightened and exacting than the conventional one, but it aroused vehement opposition. In a scientific age the subjects of marriage, love, sex and propagation were bound to come under review; but the suspicious, straight-laced English public took a long time to realise that their discussion could be important and honourable. Novelists like Grant Allen, H. G. Wells, George Gissing and Bernard Shaw finally put an end to the interdiction and made way for a flood of literature on the subject. There is hardly a person to-day who would accuse Meredith of writing immorally, although he draws conclusions as unconventional; and indeed, in many ways more daring than those of his successors. Love is essentially good and pure; but alas, what have men made of it! They have on the one hand dragged it in the mud, and on the other dressed it in unnatural garments of sentiment and romance. Meredith's wish is to restore its lost honour, for the use and delight of mankind. "Love and man sometimes meet for noble concord; the strings of the hungry instrument are not all so rough that Love's touch on them is indistinguishable from the rattling of the wheels within; certain herald harmonies have been heard. But Love, which purifies and enlarges us, and sets free the soul, Love visiting a fleshly frame must have time and space, and some help of circumstance, to give the world assurance than the man is a temple fit for the rites. Out of romances, he is not melodiously composed. And in a giant are various giants to be slain, or thoroughly subdued, ere this divinity is taken for leader. It is not done by miracle" (T.C., 145). For Meredith there is only one way which can lead to an

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

ideal union between man and wife, and that is the way of nature:

But not till Nature's laws and man's are one,  
Can marriage of the man and woman be.

That is a new and bold demand, and how seriously Meredith meant it we may see from the fact that he often repeats it in one form or another and always with emphasis: "we may be rebels against our time and its Laws: if we are really for Nature we are not lawless" (O.O.C., 101). He does not advocate the abolition of the laws, but their reform; he does not favour the "wild oats" theory; that would be just as great a sin against the holy spirit of nature as asceticism—but he wants a healthy natural way of life, which will pave the way to fuller possibilities.

Whoever accuses Meredith of immoral tendencies, or sees in him an advocate for a life of voluptuousness, must have read his books very superficially; those who adopt Tolstoi's sex morality and think that every impulse is a sin: who, like Tolstoi believe in asceticism, and on that account prophesy the extinction of the human race—such people should never take up a novel of Meredith's. He is for life as we have it; he believes in Earth and Nature, and natural things cannot be sinful to him. He dared to say so at a time when it needed some courage; and he said it not only for men (who are wont to expect forgiveness for their indulgences), but for women too. Such a proposition was an offence to tradition and morals—a pure woman was a woman without sensual feelings. That such women existed was assumed or desired. Meredith believed it to be in the order of nature that all men and women should have their *Sturm und Drang* years: "Those early gales, bred

GEORGE MEREDITH

by nature within, as well as assailing from without, are common to all save the frigid or the tepid, and the austere in principle may resist, the motherly protected and secluded, escape them. The happy accident of the absence of opportunity has helped to the rescue of many eminent virgins at the critical moments" (L., 532, 1902). His heroes and heroines have all a healthy sensual nature, without appearing offensive or unchaste. The awaking of Aminta's love to Weyburn is exquisitely unfolded; she turns to her lover after she has so long languished in a loveless marriage, because she will not belong to the class of women who go through life without having known love. "They are inanimate automatic machines, who lay them down at last, inquiring wherefore they were caused to move. She is not of that sad flock. She will be mated" (O.A., 329). She is not ashamed of "her wild music of the blood" (O.A., 275). Others may call that sinful, but to Meredith it seems only natural and right, and he gives us that splendid "marine duet" of the two strong swimmers in the sea at Felixstowe. But he is not blind to the dangers: "passion is not invariably love and we know what it can be" (B.C., 370). What it can be we see in those women "who stir the unholy in men," women like the beautiful Lady Grace, who understands admirably how to fascinate and entangle the senses of a weak man like Victor Radnor; or like the young and restless Mrs. Blathenoy, who tries to enchain Dartrey Fenellan. Alvan loses love and life through un-disciplined passion: "he loved like the desert-bred Eastern, as though his blood had never ceased to be steeped in its fountain Orient; loved barbarously, but with a compelling resolve to control his blood and act and be the civilized man, sober by virtue of his lady's gracious aid" (T.C., 222). He could not master this love: "a stormy blood made wreck

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

of a splendid intelligence" (T.C., 255)—that is the sad end of unbridled passion. Meredith always preaches self-control, and it is the cardinal virtue of all his heroes. Dartrey Fenellan, the "true man with a woman," Weyburn, Vernon and Redworth are all conspicuous for their self-restraint. "They have an intellectual refuge from the besiegings of the blood; a rock-fortress"; or perhaps they protect themselves from temptation by Weyburn's recipe, "sharp exercise of lungs and limbs" (O.A., 87). Happiness of the senses alone is not possible, and Meredith puts it quite bluntly in one of his letters: "where women are women but for the bed, there is dissolution, brain and heart paralysis" (L., 266).

##### *(a) Unity of Body and Soul*

Not the body alone, and not the soul alone, but "body and soul it must be" (D.C., 305). They are such a real unity for Meredith and so inseparably woven together, that Le Galliene could speak of "the fearless adoption of the modern conception of the unity of body and spirit," contrary to the traditional belief that the spirit wars against the flesh. For conservative readers it was a heathen, heretical view, immoral like the hateful views of the pre-Raphaelite circles, with which Meredith had some acquaintance through his friendship with Swinburne and Rossetti. But this point of view came naturally to him as a declared follower of the scientists. When one part suffers at the expense of the other; when either body or soul comes short of its rights, there can be no happy love match. Mr. Warwick married Diana for her beauty, "not for her spiritual qualities" (D.C., 61), and the result is an unhappy marriage, out of which Diana must escape if she will save her soul. Before

GEORGE MEREDITH

she gives her consent to marry Redworth he has already gained an intimate knowledge of her mind and character. "He had already wedded her morally" (D.C., 386), "wedded her in mind" (D.C., 57).

Human love will prosper when there is a harmonious union of body, mind and spirit; Redworth and Diana will live happily because their marriage is blessed by this union of their threefold natures. It is the ideal marriage of the future which Meredith here forecasts: "with her, or rather with his thought of her soul, he understood the right union of women and men, from the roots to the flowering heights of that rare graft. She gave him comprehension of the meaning of love: a word in many mouths, not often explained. With her, wound in his idea of her, he perceived it to signify a new start in our existence, a finer shoot of the tree stoutly planted in good gross earth; the senses running their live sap, and the minds companioned, and the spirits made one by the whole-natured conjunction."

*(b) Separation and Divorce*

While a marriage can only be approved when there is love on both sides, it must be immoral when there is on either side aversion. But conventional opinion clings to the sacredness of marriage, and separation is made as difficult as possible through the power of public opinion and of the law. We cannot examine the question here as to whether this is justified in the interests of the children or for reasons of finance or of the state; but Meredith's attack upon the traditional view arises from his conviction that nature's claims are more important than human institutions. He knows very well the might of tough conservatism, and finds

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

it all the more necessary to work for enlightenment and reform. The novels in which he handles this problem fall within the period from 1879 (*The Egoist*) to 1895 (*The Amazing Marriage*), Meredith's last novel. Perhaps Mrs. May Sturge Henderson is right when she says: "whenever he is dealing with problems connected with marriage, Meredith assumes the existence of the strongest prejudice against unconventional action in the mind of his public. To the present-day reader he appears to over-estimate its force, and to be led to undue lengths in combating it. . . . Circumstances have changed, and we may think that Meredith, to whom much of the improvement is due, should be fully aware of it." And again she says, "no problem indeed could exist for Clara, Aminta and Carinthia, were it not for their recognition of a standard that is abstract and non-individual." If indeed the views of the majority of mankind had advanced so radically at the time when Meredith was writing his principal novels, it would not have escaped the close attention which he paid to the movements of public opinion, and he could hardly have written as he did to Lady Ulrica Duncombe: "by and by the world will smile on women who cut their way out of a bad early marriage, or it will correct the present rough marriage-system. No young woman knows what she gives her hand to" (L., 529). Attention has been frequently drawn to an apparent contradiction in Meredith's views about divorce—a contrast between the opinions expressed in *Beauchamp's Career* and those of the later novels—with a view to tracing a change or development in his standpoint. But the question was in fact discussed in B.C. and the conservative standpoint was not accepted as the only right one. "Beauchamp is for socially enfranchising the sex: love is to be the test; and if a lady ceases to love her husband . . . .

GEORGE MEREDITH

if she sets her fancy elsewhere she's bound to leave him. Well, Dr. Shrapnel harangues about society; and men as well as women are to sacrifice their passion on that altar" (B.C., 255). That only proves how seriously Meredith took up the subject, and saw that there were two sides to it: he knew how to respect the side of law and good conduct. He did not preach free love recklessly, but maintained, even in *Diana*, that the law has its beneficial uses. Lady Dunstane says, "the rules of Christian Society are a blessed Government for us women. We owe it so much that there is not a brick of the fabric we should not prop" (D.C., 292). Beauchamp's case was very different from that of Clara, Diana or Aminta; he felt that he had a mission to fulfil, and he was essentially a politician and reformer; so a "breach of the moral law" would appear to him particularly reprehensible. If he had contracted a union with Renée it would have cut him off for ever from political activity. He had to decide between his natural inclinations and his public obligations, and there was no room for doubt that an idealist like Nevil would choose the stony path of duty. If there had only been the question for or against divorce, Meredith would surely, even at that time have taken sides with the wife who had been wronged. He finds words of deepest sympathy for Renée's sad lot by the side of the husband whom she cannot love. The ideal aim is to bring nature's laws and man's laws closer together until they coincide. Then a marriage like that of the unripe Victor Radnor with the rich old widow would be looked upon as unlawful, because "the state of sin was the continuing to live in defiance of, in contempt of, in violation of, in total degradation of Nature" (O.O.C., 55). Herbert Spencer expresses much the same view, though in other matters concerning marriage and love he is not always so

ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

advanced. With bitter contempt Victor Radnor calls the law "a clumsy bludgeon," and if we bear in mind the accusations of J. S. Mill in his "Subjection of Women" about the inequalities of man and wife before the law—Chesterton, to be sure, dismisses them as "little inequalities about marriage"—which, in fact, until 1882 were appalling, we cannot wonder at Meredith's attitude. He deals with the problem of separation in four novels, *The Egoist*, *One of our Conquerors*, *Lord Ormoni and his Aminta* and *The Amazing Marriage*. In all these cases the marriage, or the betrothal, is contracted in youthful enthusiasm by people without knowledge or experience. He was perhaps influenced by his own sad history to become opposed to early marriages. For him, as for George Eliot, the first love, like the first poem, is not the best. "May no dear woman that I know ever marry the man she first loves!" (S.B., 491).

In *The Egoist* the theme of the indissoluble marriage is frankly examined; though in this case it is not a marriage but a betrothal. If we admit that Mrs. Sturge Henderson is right about the broader-minded views of the present day, which would interpret the situation far less tragically than it appeared to Clara and Vernon, this does not alter the fact that the considerations are the same whether we are concerned with an engagement or a marriage. Without reflection Clara promised her hand to the handsome and importunate admirer before she had time to study him more closely. "In a dream somehow she had committed herself to a life-long imprisonment; and oh, terror, not in a quiet dungeon." It was soon apparent that such a union was by its very nature doomed to failure. Willoughby's vanity, his egoism and his lust for domination stirred Clara to inward and outward rebellion against the engagement. In

vain she asked Willoughby to give her back her word: "you have my plighted troth . . . given in ignorance of my feelings" (E., 147). But Willoughby insists upon the sacredness of a lover's promise: "plighted faith, the affiancing of two lovers, is a piece of religion. I rank it as holy as marriage" (E., 146). He is at length obliged to release her, and thus a sin against nature is prevented in time. For Clara's whole being revolts against him and she feels that "in her case duty was shame: hence, it could not be broadly duty" (E., 201). Her natural instinct is her defence, and her aversion seems to her to be a solemn warning: "it's a dispute between a conventional idea of obligation and an injury. Which is the more dishonourable thing to do?"

But the question of a marriage already consummated is different. Public conceptions of morality carry opinion at once to the other side. Free divorce has not yet come into existence, and Diana had to face a bitter struggle. She is given unmercifully into the power of her husband, who exposes her publicly although she is innocent. Mutual hatred is excited through the contrast between the temperaments, the gifts and the characters of this pair. Diana's sin against nature is that she, the brilliantly gifted, entered into marriage with a man of such meagre intellectual endowments. The marriage sprung from no deep love, but simply from the desire on her part to find protection and peace from the swarm of insistent admirers and persecutors. She had to pay bitterly for this sin against the sacred spirit of love. Mr. Warwick, the narrow-minded husband, who only wants to turn Diana's beauty to account, now directs against her his mad jealousy and makes their life a hell: "that life with her husband was a dungeon to her nature deeper than any imposed by present conditions." It is

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

natural antagonism which drives this pair to hate each other, transforming and destroying all their good qualities. "By resisting, I made him a tyrant; and he, by insisting, made me a rebel" (D.C., 131). "Husband grew to mean to me stifler, lung-contractor, iron mask, inquisitor, everything anti-natural." And there is no legal deliverance from such a man! "It is the case in which the world of the Laws overloading her is pitiless to women, deaf past ear-trumpets, past intercession; detesting and reviling them for a feeble human cry, and for one apparent step of revolt piling the pelted stones on them" (D.C., 291). Warwick dragged his wife before the public on a charge which he could not sustain, arising out of her friendship with Lord Dannisburgh, by which he actually benefited, for he accepted a public appointment offered to him by the noble Lord. "Here's a man, calling himself a gentleman, who just because he gets in a rage with his wife for one thing or another . . . has her out for a public horsewhipping and sets all the idiots of the kingdom against her." Her character is cleared in court, but the brutality of the law demands that she shall return to the husband who has made her the object of insult and disgrace. She has to flee, "to escape the meshes of the terrific net of the marital law brutally whirled to capture her by the man her husband" (D.C., 135); but through the law she remains chained, "her youth wasting, her blood arrested"; without hope of freedom except by death. She must renounce life by the side of a man she can love; the alternative is to expose herself, through an unsanctioned union to the contempt and persecution of society. Can we yet pass this "test of the civilised to see and hear, and add no yapping to the spectacle"? (D.C., 7). "When a woman steps out of her domestic tangle to assert, because it is a tangle, her rights

to partial independence, they sight her for their prey" (D.C., 98).

(c) *The Unsanctioned Marriage*

The problem of free love or the unsanctioned marriage is only lightly touched upon in *Diana*, and the author leaves us in doubt as to whether he would justify Diana's flight with Dacier or not. In the two following novels it becomes the central feature; together with the problem of divorce, and further in O.O.C. with the attitude of conventional society to these questions. Aminta's marriage (O.A.), like Diana's, is unhappy; the problem is only more complicated because Lord Ormont is far superior in character and dignity to a man like Warwick. But the reasons which drive Aminta to a separation are pertinent enough to justify and excuse her decision. She was condemned to lead an inactive and unhappy existence with a much older man, who was suffering under a sense of political grievances, and who would not clear her from the suspicions entertained by acquaintances that she was not his lawful wife, but only his mistress. Lord Ormont will not acknowledge her, because, in his egoism he wishes to show his contempt for the world. Pride and wounded vanity prevail over his love for Aminta, and this otherwise so chivalrous and noble man, the hero of her maiden dreams, becomes a small-minded egoist. He neither introduces her to society nor to his family; so that while she lives in luxury she leads the life of a slave, and cannot but doubt whether he loves her. "He took her for his own, and he would not call her his own. . . . He let the gossips puff at her and blur . . . admitted her in private to be his equal, degraded her in public" (O.A., 138). Aminta "was a woman perverted by her position"

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

(O.A., 229). "She was young, married, loveless, cramped in her energies, publicly dishonoured—a Lady Doubtful" (O.A., 216). She must wither, and her unsatisfied nature must some day take its revenge. Meredith adopts the point of view which we find already approved in Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*. "There are couples in the world, not coupled by priestly circumstance, who are close to a true union." Aminta and Weyburn believe that they can give an answer to the world for the unsanctioned love-match, because Lord Ormont has by his behaviour foisted away all claim to her love. "Lord Ormont had struck to fragments that barrier of the conventional oath and ceremonial union" (O.A., 330).

"Laws are necessary instruments of the majority; but when they grind the sane human being to dust for their maintenance, their enthronement is the rule of the savage's old deity, sniffing blood-sacrifice. There cannot be a based society upon such conditions. An immolation of the naturally constituted individual arrests the general expansion to which we step, decivilizes more, and is more impious to the God in man, than temporary revelries of a licence that Nature soon checks" (O.A., 330). Meredith therefore considers a step like this better for the community than offering violence to Nature. Aminta and Weyburn did not go into it in the blindness of passion. They had long held themselves in self-control and bravely fought against the revival of their school-time love. They did not close their eyes to the social consequences, and they did not consummate their love-match until Aminta had left her husband for ever. They came together, but it was with the hope that through their love they could best serve mankind. "I shall not consider that we are malefactors. . . . I don't think the just would condemn us heavily. . . . We have

GEORGE MEREDITH

to see that we do—though not publicly, not insolently, offend good citizenship. But we believe—I with my whole faith, and I may say it of you—that we are not offending Divine Law" (O.A., 384).

Matthew Weyburn and Aminta are spared the conflict with a hostile, morally outraged world, because Lord Ormont is led by his love and noble feelings to keep silence; but Victor Radnor and Nataly, on the contrary, are for ever at strife with convention. O.O.C. is an exposure of the weight of social tyranny, and perhaps Meredith's best psychological study of a tortured woman's heart. Victor Radnor, through his union with Nataly had openly broken with his elderly wife Mrs. Burman. The difference in age is here, as in O.A., a reason for the separation. Outraged nature will have its rights, and so Victor turns to the young and blooming Nataly. The fault is partly his, because he had allowed the fortune of the elderly woman to tempt him, but she is also to blame, for chaining this quite inexperienced youth of twenty-one to herself. "And then sets to work to persecute him, because he has blood in his veins, because he worships beauty; because he seeks a real marriage, a real mate. And, I say it!—let the world take its own view, the world is wrong!—because he preferred a virtuous life to the kind of life she would, she must—why, necessarily!—have driven him to, with a mummy's grain of nature in his body" (O.O.C., 222). He and Nataly suffer keenly owing to their irregular position, for they are at bottom conventional people. But while Victor finds distraction in ambitious and fantastic undertakings, Nataly tries in vain to justify her conduct to herself. She is too frail and sensitive to play the part of a rebel against society: though she is quite convinced that their great and noble love is not a condition of sin, but is in harmony with nature, she cannot silence

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

the discordant note within. "She stood in that subterranean recess for Nature against the Institutions of Man: a woman little adapted for the post of rebel . . . and when thinking of the rights and the conduct of the decrepit Legitimate—virulent in a heathen vindictiveness declaring itself holy—she had Nature's logic, Nature's voice for self-defence" (O.O.C., 101). Victor and Nataly do not openly profess their convictions, as, for example, Grant Allen's pioneers of free love, but they try to hide their position; and as Victor has at the same time the ambition to shine in high society, there comes a succession of painful situations, which inflict cruel suffering on a sensitive woman like Nataly. Like Grant Allen's heroine, she sinks at last in this wasting struggle, this constant swimming against the stream. She has to face repudiation from Victor's family: "his father's agonized amazement . . . his mother's blunt mention of the abominable name" (O.O.C., 266), and people avoid her like an infection when the facts leak out. Evening after evening Victor takes her into society, for in spite of his great love, he lacks delicacy of feeling in this matter. He compels her to run a large house and she bears it with a smiling face, although she is living all the time on a volcano; but it kills her slowly. "Daily I have to pass through, well, something like the ordeal of the red-hot ploughshares" (O.O.C., 304). Women are by nature more conservative than men, and for the same reason more intolerant against a breach of morals. "Glancing at congregated women, he had a chill. The Wives and Spinsters in ghostly judicial assembly: that is, the phantom of the offended collective woman: that is, the regnant Queen Idea issuing from our concourse of civilized life to govern Society, and pronounce on the orderly, the tolerable, the legal, and banish the rebellious" (O.O.C., 114). In

GEORGE MEREDITH

her bad moments Nataly herself feels that her love is an injustice to the old Mrs. Burman Radnor. This woman stood ever between them and "poisoned the wells round every place where he and his dear one pitched their tent." But Nesta, the "child of sin," one of the most attractive and independent of Meredith's women, is the superb justification of their union. She has capacity and strength, and, together with the "social rebel" Dartrey, she takes up the battle for the cause of unfortunate and cruelly treated women. From the novels, O.A. and O.O.C., one might almost conclude that Meredith supports the principle of free love; but he does not, like Grant Allen, categorically demand the abolition of marriage as a legal institution; he emphasises the right of men and women to come together if the law proves itself an enemy of Nature, a "clumsy bludgeon." He wants to see an improvement in the existing laws, not their abolition, believing that the ethical standard of society will advance and with it the relations of the sexes. He seems far from supporting thorough-going changes in society, which would bring about a transformation of these relations on the lines of More's *Utopia*. The one conclusion which he draws is that we ought to bring a more tolerant and sympathetic spirit to bear on decisions which have to be taken in certain delicate and intimate situations, which, in his opinion, are not normal but exceptional. In none of his novels does he deal with the fate of the children in case of a divorce. In A.M. there is no legal separation and the mother has custody of the child. It is only in a letter of 1904 (L., 561), that Meredith speaks of the children, and his point of view is characteristic: "when distaste is between the couples, it is worse for the offspring." Meredith spoke twice on the subject of marriage contracts for a limited period—to the great bewilderment of his

#### ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

admirers; because, in their opinion, such statements brought him into discredit. They relate in the one case to a newspaper interview and in the other to a passage in O.O.C. They have often been quoted and probably taken too seriously. Proposals of the kind were at the time much discussed, half in earnest and half in joke, so that it is not surprising to find Meredith putting a spoke in the wheel. Mrs. Henderson, in particular, regretted Meredith's expression of views in this connection, because it showed his attitude to marriage in a false light, and because he "appeared to treat the subject with levity." The incident has long been buried, and to-day no one doubts that Meredith was conscientious, thorough and just in all ethical and social questions. We may apply to everything that he wrote the words of a *Times* critic in reference to O.R.F.: "it certainly touches a delicate theme and includes some equivocal situations, but of impurity, in the sense of corrupting tendency, we see not a trace."

##### (d) *Wild Oats Plea: Eugenics: Children*

How far Meredith was from supporting free indulgence or from thinking too lightly about sexual questions, we may see from the views about the "wild oats" theory and its consequences for the next generation, which he expressed particularly in O.R.F. It is Sir Austin Feverel, the partly admirable, partly ridiculous representative of scientific principles and their application to human conduct, who attacks this theory of living a full life. Darley Absworth and Lord Heddon are "useful men though gouty, who had sown in their time a fine crop of wild oats, and advocated the advantage of doing so, seeing that they did not fancy

GEORGE MEREDITH

themselves the worse for it. He found one with an imbecile son and the other with consumptive daughters" (O.R.F.). Meredith was, in fact, an enthusiastic supporter of the eugenic theories which soon obtained a firm footing in England. We do not read much in the novels about the blessings of children and the happiness of parents, but the author's sound and sympathetic feelings are all the more clearly shown whenever he does write about children; they are the acknowledged purpose of a perfect marriage. He looks upon the aim and object of marriage from the watch tower of one with a high sense of responsibility. With persuasive logic and romantic fancy he tries to show how men should kindle that vital spark upon earth. True love should make the life of men and women bright and happy as they work together, bringing forth fruit to perfection.

## MEREDITH AND THE SCIENTIFIC MOVEMENTS OF HIS TIME

### INTRODUCTION: MEREDITH A SUPPORTER OF THE THEORIES OF COMTE, SPENCER, MILL AND DARWIN

ALTHOUGH we find in Meredith's novels a bold and progressive spirit much in advance of similar literature, we must not exaggerate his originality. His treatment is new, but the problems themselves were typical of his period. The most important thinkers of the day were busy with evolutionary ideas in the department of human society. We owe it to Meredith that, at a time when the majority of people showed little inclination to understand these theories, and other writers did not venture to adopt them, he made them attractive through the acceptable medium of the novel, which, in accordance with his belief, should be the vehicle of philosophy. We have seen that Meredith tried to grasp the facts of life with the mind and not with the feelings, and this was bound to attract him to the ruling ideas of his generation. The combination of science with empiricism in the philosophy of his contemporaries, the exclusion of any kind of metaphysic, the recognition of the limits of knowledge, and the reliance on experience alone, were entirely in accord with Meredith's outlook. He, too, excluded all speculation about the secrets or final purposes of nature.

GEORGE MEREDITH

Aus dieser Erde quillen meine Freuden,  
Und diese Sonne scheinet meinen Leiden

was true alike for him. He had, to be sure, no philosophical system of his own and he is no slavish follower of other modern thinkers, but their ideas are reflected in his novels, though certainly with a strong personal colouring. It is particularly in the application of modern theories to human society that he becomes a follower of J. S. Mill, Spencer and Darwin. It cannot be shown whether he had any personal acquaintance with these modern thinkers, but their writings, as well as those of Comte, caused such a sensation and brought about such a radical change in the romantic, sentimental spirit of the contemporary literature, owing to the lively controversies which they provoked between leaders of the liberal and orthodox parties, that they soon became the common property of the intellectual world. It was through Comte that evolutionary and positivist ideas came first to England, and they were taken up enthusiastically by Spencer and Lewes. From them George Eliot caught the inspiration, though she did not venture in her books to pursue her thoughts to their logical consequences. One can hardly suppose that Meredith, although he knew the French language well, had actually read the six volumes of Comte's *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (1830-42). Most Englishmen knew only extracts through Harriet Martineau's work: *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* (1853). In the same year Lewes, who was a zealous follower of Comte, published his book, *Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences*, and in 1865 appeared J. S. Mill's well-known essay, *A. Comte and Positivism*, in which he gives his views of Comte's philosophy. In a letter of 1864 Meredith directs the attention of his friend

## SCIENTIFIC MOVEMENTS OF HIS TIME

Captain Maxse to an article about Comte: "you should read Lewes's article on Comte in the *Fortnightly*" (L., 174); which shows that he and his friend were interested in such writings. Up to his last days he read the works of contemporary thinkers and their names occur frequently in his letters. Comte's opposition to theology and metaphysic appealed to the English philosophers, who were strongly agnostic and with whom Meredith was in close touch through his friends John Morley and Leslie Stephen.

## SCIENCE AND FAITH

### MEREDITH IN COMPARISON WITH TENNYSON, BROWNING AND CARLYLE

He is one of the few Victorians who escaped the agitation of mind, the pessimism and the philosophical contradictions which were cast up by the waves of the scientific movement. He is not a passionate enemy of the old faith, and he has no mind for barren controversy; his work concerns life in this world. Catholic Christianity repelled him in so far as he saw in its teaching a contempt for the body, and he was an opponent of asceticism. Renunciation of the world was obnoxious to his joy in life and acceptance of its conditions. But Meredith was never an outspoken enemy of Christianity like Swinburne; he was too cool and unprejudiced for that. On the other hand, he did not search for compromises like most of his contemporaries, who were so keenly anxious to reconcile the results of science with dogmatic belief, or to escape from the dismal present

GEORGE MEREDITH

outlook into the middle ages or classical antiquity. Among the prominent poets only Meredith and Browning, in their different ways, were optimists. Meredith faces the great enigma calmly and without fear, and strives only for strength to live an active life on earth. Tennyson would lose support and confidence without the old beliefs; he is determined to hold fast to the traditional faith in God, immortality and freedom of the will, and he seeks, without much success, a compromise with the new forces which threaten his world; but his heart is not in it, though he feels:

My own dim life should teach me this,  
That life shall live for evermore  
Else earth is darkness at the core,  
And dust and ashes all that is.

*In Memoriam*, xxxiv.

Again:

Who loves not knowledge? Who shall rail  
Against her beauty . . .

She cannot fight the fear of death.  
What is she, cut from love and faith,  
But some wild Pallas from the brain  
Of Demons? . . .

Let her know her place;  
She is the second, not the first.

*In Memoriam*, cxiv.

It is true that Tennyson speaks of progress and evolution, to give his thoughts a scientific flavour, but we always feel that it is forced, and the essence of his creed, as expressed in *In Memoriam*, is nothing but a sort of theosophy which misses fire. The effort is perceptible to prove the superiority of the old belief to the new science, and throughout the poem we seem always to hear the question which Tennyson

directed to Darwin: "Your Theory of Evolution does not make against Christianity?" Darwin, "to console him in his agony,"<sup>1</sup> replied, "No, certainly not." The founding of the so-called Metaphysical Society, of which Tennyson was a member, cannot deceive us, for we must remember that it was conceived originally as a theological fellowship, and no opponent of Christianity was admitted as a member. But later it was felt that the views of the opponents must be heard, and the most important freethinkers and scientists were admitted. Among Meredith's special friends John Morley and Leslie Stephen were members. This society, therefore, being designed to bring about an approach between theological and agnostic ideas, was typical of the period of compromises. But it died, as Huxley facetiously remarked, "of too much love."

Tennyson, therefore, cannot be designated a prophet of the new enlightenment, in spite of the fact that in 1855 Herbert Spencer sent him a letter, together with a copy of his *Psychology*, because he found in Tennyson's lines, *The Two Voices*, suggestions of his Evolution Theory.

From all this we may see why Meredith was necessarily opposed to the most famous and influential of his poetic contemporaries. A letter of Meredith's in 1869 throws a clear light upon the essential difference in gifts, and in outlook between Tennyson, the creator of a pure poetry of the feelings, and Meredith, the anti-sentimentalist, the

<sup>1</sup> cf. St. John Hankin's parody of *In Memoriam*:

When pondering much of how and why  
 And lost in philosophic lore,  
 The thought that two and two are four  
 Consoles me in my agony.  
  
 The sun sinks ever in the west,  
 And ever rises in the east.  
 I feel that this is sure at least,  
 And cannot doubt but it is best.

GEORGE MEREDITH

champion of common sense and of the Comic Spirit: "The 'Holy Grail' is wonderful, isn't it? The lines are satin lengths, the figures Sèvres china. I have not the courage to offer to review it, I should say such things. To think!—it's in these days that the foremost poet of the country goes on fluting of creatures that have not a breath of vital humanity in them, and doles us out his regular five-feet with the old trick of the vowel endings—The Euphuist's tongue, the Exquisite's leg, the Curate's moral sentiments, the British matron and her daughter's purity of tone—so he talks, so he walks, so he snuffles, so he appears divine. . . . In his degraded state I really believe he is useful, for he reflects as much as our Society chooses to show of itself. The English notion of passion, virtue, valour, is in his pages: and the air and the dress we assume are seen there—I turn to Rabelais and Montaigne with relief. Do you care to find the Holy Grail? Twenty years ago it would have excited me. This your foremost Poet is twenty years behind his time. . . . But answer me—Isn't there a scent of damned hypocrisy in all this lisping and vowelled purity of the Idylls? Well! just as you like. It's fashionable; it pleases the rose-pink ladies, it sells" (L., 197). But he knew how to give an objective judgment and to enjoy every good poem of the Laureate. His *Lucretius*, says Meredith in the same letter, is grand, and he hates "the Sir Pandarus public which has corrupted this fine (natural) singer."

In Meredith's outlook on life another great poet of his day comes nearer to him. Robert Browning's gospel of the active life, of courage and energy in word and deed, resembles Meredith's ideal of strength and honesty. Both poets are healthy optimists, but with the important distinction that Browning, although his thought is much deeper

than Tennyson's, only sees this life as a preparation for the life to come.

Carlyle's influence on Meredith has often been the subject of remark, especially on account of the well-known passage in *B.C.*, in which the style of Nevil's favourite author is so graphically described. Carlyle's principles regarding a life of work and duty may be similar to Meredith's, and we are aware that the eloquence and earnest teaching of the great prophet had strong attractions for him. "I hold," he says (L., 200), "that he is the nearest to being an inspired writer of any man in our times. . . . He speaks from the deep springs of life." But this seer cannot give reasons for the faith which is in him, and when he enters the field of practical life Meredith follows him no more: "but when he descends to our common pavement, when he would apply his eminent spiritual wisdom to the course of legislation, he is no more sagacious nor useful nor temperate than a flash of lightning in a grocer's shop. Philosophy, while rendering his dues to a man like Carlyle and acknowledging itself inferior in activity, despises his hideous blustering impatience in the presence of progressive facts. Spiritual light he has to illuminate a nation, of practical little or none, and he beats his own brains out with emphasis" (L., 200).

Meredith admits that Carlyle's teaching is a good counterpoise to empirical doctrines, but he must confess, for his own part: "I don't agree with Carlyle a bit, but I do enjoy him" (L., 114). We may say, then, that Meredith esteemed Carlyle as the prophet of moral regeneration, but was out of sympathy with his mysticism and with the strain in his constitution of a sombre, puritanical pessimism.

GEORGE MEREDITH

THE INFLUENCE OF EVOLUTIONARY THEORIES  
ON MEREDITH

(a) *Meredith's Ethical Intellectualism*

In comparison with the majority of his contemporaries Meredith absorbed scientific philosophy in a very different way and much more seriously. He did not waste his powers, in struggles with his conscience, but envisaged consequences of practical value to the human race. The evolutionary ideas, which Spencer took over from Comte before they were championed by Darwin, and which lay at the root of positivist and utilitarian systems, attracted Meredith more than experimental knowledge. Evolution was the basis of the whole of Spencer's philosophy, and it is woven in the texture of Meredith's novels. The author's ideas are built upon it, and he makes it a part of his realism. He not only presents a social, but also a spiritual and moral evolution. The newly acquired perception that mankind is not yet perfect, but is capable of improvement, was the source of his optimism. He does not look with horror at our primitive origin, but he sees above all the possibility to advance and grow. From this hope he derives his new idea of morality, an ethical intellectualism, which is based upon his belief in the progress of mankind. Comte derives his theory of evolution from biology, and then adapts it to human society. According to his system of sociology, man has passed through several stages, and is now in the third phase. Meredith speaks, too, of early primitive stages, out of which we have to rise. Like Comte, Spencer and Mill, he regards human society as an organism and speaks about its growth and natural improvement. History

SCIENTIFIC MOVEMENTS OF HIS TIME

provides him, too, with clear proof of the truth of evolution: "history has to be taken from far backward if we would gain assurance of man's advance" (O.A., 66). Again:

They, hearing History speak, of what men were,  
And have become, are wise.

*Earth's Secret.*

It is true that, though man is marching forward, he may at times be deflected from his course:

A hedge may take him, but he turns not back,  
Nor turns this burdened world, of curving spine.

*The World's Advance.*

These evolutionary ideas were followed by Darwin's teaching of Natural Selection and the struggle for existence, which found an ardent supporter in Thomas Huxley. A great sensation was created and so we are not surprised to find the new catchwords in Meredith's novels, as, for example, "natural selection" (E., 310) and he "looked the fittest; he justified the dictum of Science" (E.38), and, "in this department of the universal struggle, success is awarded to the bettermost" (E., 36).

What were the ethical and social consequences which Meredith derived from this teaching? The new philosophy was of little value without its practical application to our lives. Sociology must be treated not in a purely theoretical way, but with the practical object of reorganising society. Comte's dictum: *voir pour prévoir*, holds good for Meredith too, but in order to begin with a reform of mankind, it is necessary first of all *de réorganiser les*

GEORGE MEREDITH

*opinions* (*Cours*, vi), which Meredith does. But our way of thinking must first be changed from top to bottom before we can begin with the work of reform. This is the kernel of Meredith's thought, and next comes an exact study of mankind, which was Meredith's life work. "L'étude de l'humanité est la seule étude vraiment finale," to quote again from Comte's *Cours*, vi. Meredith is not, however, thinking about society in any limited sense, but he has in view a future society which shall embrace the whole of mankind. He does not confine his attention to English society, although, as an Englishman, his criticism begins there, but he speaks always of the progress of mankind, of the generation, of the race in general. We have seen that Matthew Weyburn's ideal was a school for the subjects of all nations, so that they might be welded together as capable members of one society. Nevertheless, Meredith does not lose himself in barren internationalism; he knows how to esteem and appreciate national qualities. The natural consequence of a belief in an unlimited capacity for development of the human character is the demand for a systematic education to bring us to a higher level. Self-education and public education must go hand in hand; we may choose as our guide either the intellect or the feelings. With Comte it is the intellect, while the feelings play a larger part with Spencer; we may probably say that most of the English philosophers adopt a middle position. Science teaches us the gradual ascent from animals to man: our behaviour is affected by our likes and dislikes, but we should not allow ourselves to be guided only by our feelings, which is more appropriate to dumb animals than to men with reasoning faculties. Only through reflection, with the help of the intellect, can we distinguish between lower and higher benefits, and it is only by the subordination of our feelings

to the recognition of real values that we can do profitable work. The union of feeling and reflection, of emotional and intellectual factors in our volition, is characteristic of the utilitarians; but Meredith went further than Spencer: he believed that the mind is destined, not only to guide us in personal conduct, but consciously to change the form of humanity. The creative power of the human mind, the importance of far-reaching aims, pointing to a higher human fellowship no longer subject to crude natural forces, as well as the development of the individual to become a useful member of the community—these are ideas of which we find few traces in Spencer's *Sociology*. Meredith's general outlook is far superior to the individualism of the utilitarians: they aim indeed at a reconciliation of the individual with the universal, but he, while respecting the personality, subordinates the individual to the cause of the body public. He is a thorough supporter of a humane universalism, which regards the progress of the whole rather than the happiness of the individual. In the composition of our lives the strongest factor is not mere self-culture, but the social conscience. Meredith is opposed to the eudemonism, which is a mark of Spencerian philosophy: the egoistical search for personal happiness and comfort. Like Browning and another spiritual kinsman, Nietzsche, he loved battle and accepted it as a means of progress, encouraged in this belief by Darwinism.

Rich labour is the struggle to be wise,  
While we make sure the struggle cannot cease.

So begins his sonnet, *The Discipline of Wisdom*; and the struggle will yield rich fruit, not merely in the life to come,

GEORGE MEREDITH

but here on earth, for men's achievements live on, and

no death will be  
The name be an empty thing;

if men will but love the struggle and the life.

This life of the visible, audible ring  
With thy love tight about.

It shall be the duty of every individual to fight for the future of the race.

Thou under stress of the strife  
Shalt hear for sustainment supreme,  
The cry of the conscience of life:  
Keep the young generation in hail,  
And bequeath them no tumbled house!

*The Empty Purse.*

This struggle is worthy of life and more important than mere pleasure.

There is an end to joy: there is no end  
To striving; therefore let us strive  
In purity that shall the toil befriend  
And keep our poor mortality alive.

*Vittoria, Chap. xxi.*

Meredith does not recognise, like Browning, the thought of rest in God. Nature herself, ethical progress, just laws: all this is divine, and our desires should be directed towards an ever higher development, not towards a golden age of rest and perfection. He lays the greatest emphasis on

human will and conduct; morality, which is the product of a toilsome process, must aspire ever to higher standards. The crowning merit of his work is that he sets before us as the object of our life a new human ideal.

(b) *Meredith is not, like Nietzsche, a Supporter of Darwinism as a Social Science*

He has the vision of a superman to be created, but not in the same sense as Nietzsche. Meredith's ideal is to be realised within the sphere of our present humanity, while for Nietzsche, under the influence of Darwinian theories of evolution, the goal of our aspirations was to be progression towards an entirely new human variety. We cannot say whether Meredith knew anything of Nietzsche's work, though in a letter of 1906 he wrote: "but the more we know of Goethe's mother the more terrible is the thought of that Nietzschean Upperman her son" (L., 580). Apart from the purely practical consequences which are important in eugenics, and which we have seen, Meredith appreciated at their full value, he was never a supporter of the so-called sociological Darwinism which was popular with the writers of his day. Human society is not like the animal kingdom, and morality saves us from the struggle for existence in its harshest forms. Meredith's philosophy was grounded upon the supremacy of the mind, and he could not see man's forward view subjected to the blind laws of nature. He is like Huxley, Darwin's great scholar and champion, an opponent of the conception of life as a gladiatorial arena. But although Meredith does not contemplate the possibility of creating consciously a new human species, and does not altogether share Nietzsche's hero worship, we find in many details a relationship between these two sages. For both

GEORGE MEREDITH

the ultimate aim is the creation of the true man, in whom all trace of animal nature shall have disappeared; who will be spiritually the élite of the philosophers, the artists and the saints. Meredith shares, moreover, Nietzsche's aversion to the ignorant masses, and his characters are intellectually real aristocrats. Men and women are equally capable of aspiring to this ideal; not that the two sexes will become alike, but they will converge towards a middle line. They meet each other in their common aim towards a higher cultural development, and their intellectual co-operation will make them more alike. The faith in a personal guidance of the world is shaken, and men must therefore take in hand their own advancement. Meredith and Nietzsche have here very much in common; first, as we saw before, the union of aristocratic individualism with the idea of elevating the whole community, and secondly, a strong reforming characteristic in their disposition to submit themselves to the conception of morality which they themselves prescribe. For both, ethical values outweigh æsthetical; they both find pleasure in fighting and in critical examination; it is therefore not surprising that in style they adopt sharp-pointed clauses, epigrams and antitheses, the same combination of prophetical interpretation with poetic imagination, the same aversion to metaphysic, the same optimistic outlook upon the things of this world, upon the pleasures which life can give, if the passions are controlled; the same dislike for all forms of Christianity which reject the things of this world; on the other hand they repudiate the eudemonic ideals of the utilitarians. Meredith and Nietzsche both advanced far beyond purely scientific or biological conceptions of life; consciously setting before themselves as their aim the promotion of cultural progress which they recognised as a historic fact.

(c) *Meredith in contrast to Comte*

According to Comte there is physiological and biological proof that women are by the laws of nature intellectually inferior to men. "Les seuls résultats possibles d'une lutte insensée contre les lois naturelles, qui de la part des femmes, fournirait de nouveaux témoignages involontaires de leur propre infériorité . . . elles (les femmes) leur sont inférieures quant à l'intelligence et à la raison" (*Cours*, iv, 407). He believed that positive biology revealed nothing more in the feminine sex than "une sorte d'état d'enfance continué, que l'éloigne d'avantage sous les plus importants rapports, du type idéal de la race" (*Cours*, iv). Gall's confirmation of the fact that women have smaller brains, along with the constitutional differences between the sexes are for Comte sufficient proof that women are physically and morally inferior, which only a "chimérique transformation de notre organisme cérébral" could alter. For which reason he censures severely those "chimériques déclamations révolutionnaires sur la prétendue égalité des deux sexes." We have seen that Meredith, too, does not overlook these differences, but he comes to other conclusions based on the theory of evolution. The logical result of Comte's opinions is that he requires women to be subordinated to men: "indispensable subordination des sexes, principe essentiel du mariage" (*Cours*, iv). It is true that the state of marriage is subject to the law of evolution, but still Comte believes that the subjection of women to men is unalterable, unavoidable and natural. This point of view is characteristic of the age in which Comte wrote and is generally representative of English literature of the time. In the family, he contends, the woman is a priestess; she has her freedom there, and is entitled to the fullest honour and

#### GEORGE MEREDITH

respect; but outside the house she is an infant and must have nothing to do with public life. In this opinion George Eliot was influenced by Comte; she, too, believes that the home is woman's world, and that public activity is not desirable for her. She is not alone in thinking this; before Meredith it was the standpoint represented generally in English novels, although there is no lack of champions for the women's cause since the days of Mary Wollstonecraft. Such championship, however, evoked little response from the conservative English public, which preferred its sentimental indulgences, to the recognition of unpleasant truths. Mary Wollstonecraft had already claimed for women a better education, and, in fact, co-education in public schools. She demanded equal political and economic rights, and, above all, an equal moral code for man and wife; but in the reaction which followed the period of the French Revolution these bold demands were forgotten. The cause of women, however, could not be hushed in silence; new champions, men and women, were ever coming forward; even in the first half of the century Harriet Martineau claimed the right of women to the vote, and in 1850 Miss Buss established her high school for girls. In 1869 Girton College was founded. The most powerful champion of women was, however, John Stuart Mill, who demanded for them complete emancipation and equal rights with men.

#### *(d) Meredith and Contemporary Literature*

But writers remained strangely indifferent to this movement, which showed how little it had influenced the spirit of the times. As we have already said, George Eliot's attitude was conventional. The Brontës were bolder; they recognised and tried to ameliorate the helpless position of

women in questions of education and entry into the professions, but they remained quite conventional about the relations between men and women. In 1856 Elizabeth Browning's *Aurora Leigh* marked a step forward. She boldly claimed independence for women, though in many other respects she was conservative, and *Aurora Leigh* herself is by no means a type of the "new woman." Nevertheless verses like the following show appreciation of the question and a progressive outlook:

The honest, earnest man must stand and work,  
The woman also—otherwise she drops  
At once below the dignity of man,  
Accepting serfdom.

Again,

. . . you forget too much  
That every creature female as the male,  
Stands single in responsible act and thought.

And this time with caustic irony,

As long as they keep quiet by the fire  
And never say 'no' when the world says 'aye,'  
For that is fatal—their angelic reach  
Of virtue, chiefly used to sit and darn,  
And fatten household sinners.

Her poem, too, *A Man's Requirements*, is a keen satire on contemporary ideas of love and marriage.

But Tennyson, the poet laureate, is thoroughly reactionary; we have already touched upon his attitude to the Darwinian, evolutionary movement, and he was just as much out of sympathy with the emancipation of women, for which, too, his admirers, who liked to think of him as

GEORGE MEREDITH

a prophet of all progressive ideas, had little feeling. Tennyson's *Princess* is essentially a glorification of the traditional "feminine woman," whose aspirations towards education are merely amusing. We can forgive him for attacking the extravagances of the women's movement, but it is disappointing to find him showing so little understanding for the real question. He is for ever the poet of beautiful feelings, and Ida is again the traditional loving wife of the good old times, only with a little suggestion of modern treatment. A few beautiful passages cannot deceive us; they only show that Tennyson understood how to adapt himself to the popular sentiment. There are phrases at the end of the poem which express ideas surprisingly similar to Meredith's; it is a pity, however, that they are only isolated sentences, which cannot be brought into harmony with the tendency of the poem as a whole. Reading the following citations, we could almost believe in Tennyson as a progressive poet; but unfortunately his characters do not in any way put such theories into practice. They are not like Meredith's characters, progressive both in word and deed. Thus Tennyson says:

The woman's cause is man's: they rise or sink  
Together.

If she be small, slight-natured, miserable,  
How shall men grow?

. . . let her make herself her own  
To give or keep, to live and learn and be  
All that not harms distinctive womanhood.

Then follows a thought which we might say is almost word for word Meredithian:

For woman is not undeveloped man,  
But diverse

• • • •  
Not like to like, but like in difference.  
Yet in the long years liker must they grow;  
The man be more of woman she of man;  
He gain in sweetness and in moral height,  
She mental breadth.

Then we shall have Paradise on earth—

Then springs the crowning race of humankind.

But as we have said, Tennyson does not deceive us; the derision in his treatment of the woman's movement is too obvious, his ecstasies of soft feminine feelings too conspicuous. He becomes pathetic and really enthusiastic just in those passages which appeal to the feelings:

And round these halls a thousand baby loves  
Fly twanging headless arrows at the hearts.

Take again Ida's motherless joy in the little orphan whom she takes to her warm heart. When Tennyson allows the old king to speak about the true vocation of women, he is much more himself, so that one cannot help suspecting that he is sympathising with the old man's reactionary views,

Man for the field and woman for the hearth:  
Man for the sword and for the needle she:  
Man with the head and woman with the heart:  
Man to command and woman to obey;  
Or else confusion.

GEORGE MEREDITH

Another of the king's remarks is interesting, because it reminds one so strongly of what has already been said here about Meredith's primitive man:

Man is the hunter; woman is his game:  
The sleek and shining creatures of the chase,  
We hunt them for the beauty of their skins;  
They love us for it, and we ride them down.

That education and womanly charms are not self-contradictory is a thought which Tennyson quite overlooks.

(e) *Meredith's Agreement with John Stuart Mill*

The above comparison with poets who were contemporaries of Meredith shows how far he was in advance of his time, and how he was the first to proclaim in a novel the bold and insistent demands of Mill, who was more logical than Spencer in the conclusions which he drew from the teachings of evolution. Mill applied the law of evolution also to woman, maintaining that her intellect was just as capable of development as that of man, if only she could have favourable conditions for her advancement. We have already seen that Spencer favoured marriage reform and a higher ethical standard of the relations between the sexes; indeed he held, in contrast to Comte, that when in process of evolution society reaches a higher standard, the dependence of women upon men will be abolished. Like Comte, he sharply condemned marriages of convenience or for money, but he did not embrace the cause of the women to the same extent as Mill. He believed that too much intellect would be dangerous for them, because study deprives them of the physical exercise of which they stand

so much in need, and also makes them less attractive to men. Here he is in complete disagreement with Meredith, who bewails the lack of brain in women. Meredith looks further and realises the importance of clever, educated women, not only in the professions, but above all to make them better mothers and wives. He had a great admiration for Mill, and agrees with him in demanding complete equality and freedom between the sexes. A distinguishing characteristic of both these writers (which they share, too, with Spencer), is their sense of justice, and it is this which makes them the devoted advocates of women's liberation. Comte believed that the improvement of the individual was intended to serve the cause of the community, but Mill's view goes deeper: he contends that it is only the independence of the individual which gives him the capacity to work for the progress of humanity, and for this reason he advocates the legal and economic enfranchisement of women. He pleads their cause in his book, *The Subjection of Women* (1869), which is a vehement attack upon the existing conditions, embracing nearly all the demands later proclaimed by Meredith. Previously, in his book, *On Liberty*, which Meredith commends in one of his letters, Mill pointed out how human development is hindered by the tyranny which society exercises over the individual, a point in which he opposed Comte in particular. In contrast, he emphasised just as Meredith does, the rights of nature, and attacked the "Calvinist" ideal of obedience and self-suppression. He held that a combination of "Pagan self-assertion" and "Christian self-denial"; of self-culture and self-control, is the only way to healthy growth of the human character. This makes it worth while to fight against the despotism of custom, which is a hindrance to progress. These are all thoughts which Meredith expresses in a similar way, when

GEORGE MEREDITH

he rages against the dictates of society, or defends nature's rights against the existing unjust laws. In fact, Mill, like Meredith, blames men for the inferiority of women; they are "what men made them." They have learned submission in order to please the men, "and all the current sentimentalities tell them that it is their nature to live for others . . . and have no life but in their affections." They are expected to have what Meredith calls "an artificially enlarged heart"; everything else they must suppress as being "contrary to the proprieties of their sex"; they must have submission and sweetness in order to attract men. And until the relations of men and women are altered, "this hothouse and stove cultivation," as Mill calls it, will endure, and women will be "hothouse-plants, shielded from the wholesome vicissitudes of air and temperature"—"artificial products"; and it will not be possible to form a just opinion of women's gifts and capacities for development, for "no other class of dependents have had their character so entirely distorted from its natural proportions by their relations with their masters." Like Meredith, Mill also condemns above all the egoism of the "lord and master" for whose benefit and pleasure women's development has been forcibly arrested, and he appeals for a more healthy education of girls. Hitherto they had suffered by exclusion from wholesome physical training and from the freedom allowed to their brothers; they were "untrained in any of the occupations and exercises which give stimulus and development to the circulatory and muscular system, while their nervous system, especially in its emotional department, is kept in unnaturally active play." This corresponds exactly with Meredith's view, his wrath, as we saw, was kindled against the unhealthy, sentimental education of girls. Mill will have no half measures;

he demands unconditional equality between the sexes, as the only possible basis for a healthy community; and this is a demand which we find in all Meredith's novels, and more especially in the *Essay on Comedy*. "Society in equality is its normal state," says Mill, for "the only school of genuine moral sentiment is society between equals. We have had the system of subjection, and the system of chivalry; the time has now come for the system of justice." This demand for equality must result in far-reaching changes in the social sphere, which also Mill has the courage to approve. In word and deed, in his writings and in Parliament, he claims complete equality between men and women. The economic independence of woman, he says, is essential for her emancipation from the state of subjection: "the power of earning is essential to the dignity of a woman." The old prejudice against a literary education must go, and women must be admitted to all the professions. It reads almost like a passage from *Diana* when Mill says, "women who read, much more women who write, are, in the existing constitution of things a contradiction and a disturbing element and it was wrong to bring women up with any acquirements but those of an odalisque or of a domestic servant." When women are independent their position in marriage will be essentially different. As a matter of course Mill not only wishes to see the abolition of unjust and obsolete marriage laws, but also demands political and voting rights for women. He did not speak in vain, for nearly all his reform proposals have been realised. It took a long time for them to penetrate, but they were never quite lost sight of, so that already in 1882 it was possible to carry through a reform of marriage law, and more recently, during the war, voting rights were won by the women.

GEORGE MEREDITH

Thus a continuous evolution in the relations of the sexes to each other is taking place before our eyes. We pass from the stage of women's dependence gradually to equality and freedom for both sexes. The age of enlightenment, with its critical observation of the natural endowments of women, accelerated development; but there was always the need for champions, to stem the forces of reaction which would bring back the old relations. Moral delinquencies and old prejudices have still too strong a hold upon the multitude, so that fresh impetus is always necessary to maintain the cause. As yet we have by no means reached the ideal to which we aspire; we still need men like Mill and Meredith to lead and teach us. The word of a poet and novelist can do more than the scientific and dry treatises of the theorists, and if in reality a gradual transformation of the relations between the sexes has been accomplished, which relies not so much on legislation as on a change of heart and opinions —then we may say that Meredith's works have contributed a share towards this cultural advancement.

## CONCLUSION

THE fact that German critics only began to read Meredith in the twentieth century gives them an advantage over his contemporaries, who were, perhaps, too close to their subject; moreover the world in which we live to-day is so different from Meredith's world that it is possible to form an estimate of what has been lost or won by the changes, and to consider how far he was a herald of things to come. German critics were able to study the work of English, French and American reviewers and so form riper judgments. No one will deny that they have added some worthy contributions and said things which needed to be said.

In the foregoing reviews there is no mention of Meredith's historical poems. *The Nuptials of Attila* is a fine composition, reflecting in wild, passionate lines the spirit of that "Empire built of scorn," which dissolved and sank at the moment when the Hun leader had promised his followers to make a final reckoning with Rome.

The *Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History* review the fortunes of France from 1789 on through the nineteenth century. She, the Mother of Reason, sprang up for freedom like a bride to meet the bridegroom; but her "burning love was corrupt of an infuriate hate," and "she drank what makes man demon at the draught." "These Odes," wrote Meredith to Eugen Frey, "need to be read twice—and that is much against them in this country." Thomas Hardy certainly won more favourable reception for *The Dynasts*, but in his great drama the

GEORGE MEREDITH

characters are helplessly and hopelessly at the mercy of unseen Powers; they are rather like marionettes or parts of a machine. Meredith looks into the heart of the tyrant; cannon is his name, the cannon's cave his mind, and his failure is due, not to the stars, but to human weakness and error. France is personified; she is the heroine who loses all too soon those lofty ideals of liberty and brotherhood, which were born with the French Revolution. She is Napoleon's mistress, who has bartered her soul and her children for gemmed disgrace, and must at length submit to the judgment of a foreign court.

The song of Liberty in her hearing spoke  
A foreign tongue; Earth's fluttering little lyre  
Unlike, but like the raven's ravening croak.

In *France* and *Alsace-Lorraine* we see the tragic end of the Napoleonic Legend.

Where is the Shape of glad array;  
The nervous hands, the front of steel,  
The Clarion tongue? Where is the bold proud face?

But France's spirit is immortal; "she shall rise worthy of her prototype":

She who had her Jeanne;  
The child of her industrious;  
Earth's truest, earth's pure fount from the main.

In the clash of personalities on a crowded stage Meredith was a master of vivid presentation. No one who has once read them can forget such scenes as the cricket supper and the dinner party at Beckley Court in *Evan Harrington*; the unveiling of the statue in *Harry Richmond*; the garden

#### CONCLUSION

parties in *Sandra Belloni* and *One of our Conquerors*. No comedy has brought together types more various than that little world of characters, humble and sophisticated, who make up the *dramatis personæ* of *The Egoist*.

He did not live to see the Great War and the subsequent anarchy in life and letters. Not only new literary methods, but new social and economic systems, have been discovered by post-War writers and national leaders, whose knowledge comes by intuition, and who have no need to tread the old toilsome path which leads uphill all the way. Some words of Meredith, which have already been quoted, will bear repeating here:

Science, I presume, will at last put it to our option whether we will improve one another from off the face of the globe, and we must decide by our common sense.



# INDEX

## A

AINSLEY, DOUGLAS, 106  
Akenside, M., 184  
Allen, Grant, 266, 279, 280  
Ariosto, Ludovico, 101 ff.  
Aristophanes, 37  
Aristotle, 37, 121, 225  
Arnold, Matthew, 151  
Aronstein, Philipp, 95 ff.  
Augustine, Saint, 80, 81  
Austen, Jane, 190

## B

BAKER, G. P., 97  
Balzac, 24  
Barine, Arvède, 60  
Barrie, J. M., 76  
Becker, Reinhard, 19, 135 ff.  
Beethoven, 137  
Bennett, Arnold, 98, 100  
Benucci, Alessandra, 109  
Bierig, Erna, 19, 37, 53, 187 ff.  
Bismarck, 57, 85  
Boiardo, 116, 117  
Bowring, E. A., 185  
Brendel, Adam, 65, 66, 73 ff., 177  
Brewer, E. V., 67, 68  
Brontës, The, 298  
Browning, Elizabeth, 155, 299  
Browning, R., 77, 112, 155, 208,  
286 ff.

## GEORGE MEREDITH

Büchner, Friedrich, 32

Bulwer-Lytton, 98

Buss, Miss, 298

Byron, 112

## C

CAMILLA, 108

Carlyle, 33, 56, 61, 72, 91, 130, 147,  
182, 209, 289 ff.

Carpenter, Edward, 203, 265

Cervantes, 67, 68, 211

Chambers, Robert, 32

Charlemagne, 104

Chaucer, 110

Chesterton, G. K., 79, 209, 210, 273

Cloud, Edward, 147

Colonna, Vittoria, 107

Comte, A., 120, 121, 146, 199, 215,  
284 ff.

Corinne, 108

Crees, J. H. E., 39

Croce, Benedetto, 37, 105, 106, 110

Cunliffe, J. W., 183

Curle, R. H. P., 48, 49, 52, 53

## D

"DAILY MAIL," 181

Darwin, 32, 33, 120, 121, 146, 147  
199, 284 ff.

Delmer, F. S., 18

*Deutsche Rundschau*, 18, 150

Dick, Ernst, 19, 22 ff., 82 ff.

Dickens, 18, 29, 100, 197, 212

Diogenes, 69

Disraeli, 98, 147

Douglas, James, 210

Duncombe, Lady, 53, 204, 226, 271

## INDEX

### E

ECCLESIASTES, 90  
Eckermann, 131, 133  
Edwards, Rev. E. W., 111  
Eliot, George, 76, 94, 100, 187 ff., 197,  
209, 273, 284, 298  
Eliot, T. S., 187  
Elizabeth, Queen, 102  
Ellis, H., 247  
Emerson, R. W., 183  
Engels, Frederick, 149  
Erasmus, 56  
d'Este, Cardinal, 101, 116  
Este, House of, 102  
Ezekiel, 61

### F

FACCHERI, G. T., 32, 33  
Fechter, Paul, 150  
Fehr, Bernhard, 29 ff., 120, 211  
Fernandez, Ramon, 194  
Ferrara, Duchess of, 107  
Fichte, J. G., 94  
Fielding, H., 97, 212  
Fisher, Rt. Hon. H. A. L., 90  
Flaubert, 24, 190, 191  
Fletcher, Mrs. A. E., 263  
Forbes, Sir John, 140, 141  
Forel, 247  
Fox, C. J., 112  
Frazer, Sir J. G., 115  
Frederick The Great, 20  
Freiligrath-Kroeker, Käthe, 18  
Frey, Eugen, 36, 224, 307  
Friends, Society of, 258

### G

GALL, F. J., 297  
Galland, René, 143  
Galsworthy, John, 98, 100

## GEORGE MEREDITH

Gardner, Edmund G., 106, 110  
G.-R. Monatsschrift, 82  
Girton College, 298  
Gissing, George, 98, 255, 266  
Goethe, 20, 23, 27, 58, 59, 64, 68,  
92, 93, 94, 97, 99, 127 ff., 177,  
182 ff., 211, 295  
*Golden Bough, The*, 115  
Goldsmith, Oliver, 97  
Gotthelf, Jeremias, 24  
Grand, Sarah, 255  
Grimsehl, Greta, 20, 21, 197 ff.

## H

HADRIAN VI, Pope, 71  
Hammerton, J. A., 17, 210  
Hankin, St. John, 287  
Hardy, Thomas, 59, 91, 94, 96, 98,  
100, 148, 199, 307  
Harington, Sir John, 102, 103, 104,  
117  
Harpalyce, 108  
Harraden, Beatrice, 178  
Hauvette, Henri, 102  
Hazlitt, William, 102  
Hebbel, C. F., 227, 249  
Hegel, 60, 150  
Heine, 132  
Helmholtz, 32  
Henderson, Mrs. M. S., 48, 183, 206,  
271, 273, 281  
Henslowe, Philip, 95  
Herbart, J. F., 52  
Herodotus, 116  
Herrick, Robert, 155  
Höffding, H., 54  
Holberg, Baron von, 67  
Homeric, 64, 112  
Horace, 110  
Humboldt, Friedrich, 32  
Huxley, Thomas, 147, 287, 291, 295  
Hyndman, William, 142

## INDEX

### I

IBSEN, HENRIK, 83, 100, 240

### J

JASSOP, AUGUSTUS, 171, 204  
Johnson, Samuel, 92, 93, 111

### K

KANT, IMMANUEL, 177  
Keats, John, 46, 155  
Key, Ellen, 247  
Krusemeyer, M., 127 ff

### L

LASALLI, FERDINAND, 132  
Le Gallienne, R., 75, 153, 269  
Leibnitz, 91  
Lever, Charles J., 18  
Lewes, G. H., 284, 285  
Lincoln, Abraham, 59  
*Literarische Echo, Das*, 18, 47  
Longfellow, 61  
Lucretius, 288

### M

MANTUA, DUCHESS OF, 107  
Manzoni, Alessandro, 105  
Martineau, Harriet, 178, 254, 258,  
284, 298  
Marx, Karl, 149  
Mary of Modena, 102  
Maupassant, 212  
Maurice, F. D., 254  
Maxse, Fred., 21, 148, 204, 285  
McCarthy, Justin, 137  
McKechnie, Rev. J., 39, 158  
Menander, 37, 38  
Mendès, Catulle, 212  
Mertner, Edgar, 20, 152 ff

## GEORGE MEREDITH

Metaphysical Society, 287  
Meyer, H., 68, 154  
Meyerfeld, Max, 47  
Meynell, Alice, 163  
Michaelangelo, 91, 107  
Mill, J. S., 32, 178, 199, 215, 254,  
264, 273, 284, 290 ff.  
Milton John, 81, 99, 110  
Molière, 28, 38, 76, 211, 225  
Moll, Marie, 20, 178 ff.  
*Monitor* and *Merrimac*, 148  
Montaigne, 288  
Moore, George, 310  
More's *Utopia*, 280  
Morley, Henry, 103, 152  
Morley, John, 127, 285, 287  
Morris, William, 265  
Mudie's Library, 96

## N

NAHLOWSKY, J. W., 49, 51, 52  
Napoleon, 85, 150, 308  
Neuwied, 18, 20, 83, 152 ff., 159, 180  
Nicolls, Mary E., 180, 203  
Nietzsche, 37, 206, 219, 293 ff.  
Nisus, King of Megara, 115  
Norton, Mrs. Caroline, 178  
Novalis, 60

## O

OATES, CAPT. L. E. G., 59  
Ogden, C. K., 46  
*Orlando Furioso*, 101 ff.

PALEY, WILLIAM, 91  
Pasquinen, 69 ff.  
Peacock, Thomas Love, 203  
Photiadès, Constantin, 210  
Pope, Alexander, 92, 111, 127  
Priestley, J. B., 146, 154, 175

## INDEX

### R

RABELAIS, 56, 288  
Racowitz, Helene v., 132  
Richardson, Samuel, 97, 249  
Richelieu, 85  
Richter, J. P., 20, 36, 56 ff., 132, 191  
—, *Hesperus*, 59  
—, *Levana*, 61  
—, *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, 67, 69  
Roget, Dr. J. L., 58  
Rolli, 111  
Rose, W. S., 113  
Ross, Janet, 204  
Rossetti, D. G., 269  
Rousseau, J. J., 130, 254  
Ruskin, John, 178

### S

SANTIS, FRANCESCO DE, 106  
Sappho, 108  
Schiller, 58, 59, 64, 99, 206  
Schopenhauer, 150  
Scott, Sir Walter, 98, 112  
Seeley, Sir J. R., 95  
Shakespeare, 20, 24, 61, 64, 74, 77,  
99, 200, 211, 240  
Shaw, G. B., 82, 151, 266  
Shelley, 125, 155, 156, 161  
Short, Mrs. Gordon, 21  
Sigerson-Shorter, Dora, 190  
Sixtus V, Pope, 71  
Smith, Garnet, 207, 208  
Socrates, 37  
Sophocles, 91  
Sotteeck, Julie, 18  
Spencer, Herbert, 32, 33, 61, 121,  
140, 147, 165 ff., 199, 215, 254,  
258, 272, 277, 284, 287 ff.  
Spenser, Edmund, 114  
Stauffer, Paul, 59, 61  
Steig, Reinhold, 18

GEORGE MEREDITH

Stendhal, 213  
Stephen, Leslie, 110, 263, 285, 287  
Sterne, Laurence, 56  
Strindberg, August, 240  
Strong, Hugh W., 168, 200  
Swanwick, Anna, 134  
Swift, Dean, 56  
Swinburne, A. G., 209, 269, 285  
Symons, Arthur, 182, 191

TACITUS, 24  
Tennyson, 112, 132, 134, 155, 209,  
286 ff.  
Tesche, Karl, 120 ff., 183  
Thackeray, W. M., 29, 98, 100,  
187 ff., 197  
Thomas, Calvin, 119  
Thomson, James, 184  
Tiberius, 85  
Tieck, Ludwig, 119  
The Times, 264, 281  
Tolstoi, 267  
Trevelyan, G. M., 25, 36, 149, 241  
Trollope, Anthony, 98

U

UHLAND'S *William Tell*, 152

V

VICO, GIOVANNI B., 37  
Victoria, Queen, 102  
Voltaire, 20, 38, 92, 93  
Vulliamy, Marie, 159, 204

W

WALLRAF-RICHARTZ MUSEUM, 117  
Walz, Heinz, 19, 155 ff.  
Warburton, John, 101

## INDEX

Ward, Mrs. Humphry, 254  
Warton, Joseph, 184  
Wells, H. G., 98, 100, 266  
Wheatcroft, Miss, 263  
Wieland, 117  
Wilde, Oscar, 82, 210  
Wollstonecraft, Mary, 178, 254, 258  
298  
Woods, Alice, 20  
Wordsworth, 122, 182  
Wrage, Emil, 19, 46 ff.  
Wundt, Wilhelm, 47

## Z

ZEDDIES, WALTRUD, 182 ff.  
Zendavesta. 32  
Zola, Emile, 213



